New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1947

Volume VIII, Number 3 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of March 10, 1947

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Theatre Critics Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK MIRROR — NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK SUN — NEW YORK POST — NEW YORK TIMES

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"Parlor Story"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

MARCH 5, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Big Room, No Story

THE author of "Parlor Story" covers a lot of territory before the final curtain is rung down on the new offering at the Biltmore. His dramatic meanderings are amiable but dull. Although a proficient company is implicated in the William McCleery comedy, it has a devil of a time making a theatrical point, or stimulating amusement. A crusading professor of journalism, his family, a ruthless newspaper proprietor, a shilly-shallying governor, a couple of state troopers and an eager beaver student are some of the characters in "Parlor Story." In the course of their encounters such subjects as freedom of the press, the duties of a wife, divorce and the sex viewpoint of the adolescent are discussed. The result is a catch-as-catch-can show.

• • •

Doing most of the catching at the Biltmore are Walter Abel and Edith Atwater. As the teacher and his wife, they hew to some sort of continuity in the piece, snatching moments of merriment from a script which is too often merely verbose. Abel keeps the idealist, who almost compromises with his principles, an almost recognizable figure. It is not his fault that the action frequently finds him in situations which are both contrived and corny. Miss Atwater brings a dignity and a pleasantly arch quality to the role of the woman who is not above stooping to political chicanery to get her man his heart's desire. Together they reveal what little substance there is in the play.

The others are more at the mercy of undistinguished writing and plotting. Royal Beal gives a sinister shading to the part of the double-crossing publisher who wants to ruin the journalism professor when he can't hire him, but the force of his characterization is dissipated in a slap-happy climax. Paul Huber is good enough as the governor and Frank Wilcox and Dennis King jr., add clowning bits to the general confusion of the drama. The boy and girl roles are handled by Richard Noyes and Carol Wheeler, who are generally baffled by the goings-on.

• • •

As an ex-newspaper man McCleery speaks with some authority in ridiculing a reactionary press, or pleading for freedom of expression in a university town somewhere west of the Missouri River. As a dramatist he lets his little comedy get badly out of hand. Meanwhile Bretaigne Windust has not helped matters much with his staging, which is altogether too halting for sustained hilarity. There is an appropriate setting by Raymond Sovey. It might have framed more fun than is to be found at the Biltmore.

'PARLOR STORY.'

Play by William McCleery; staged by Bretaigne Windust; setting by Raymond Sovey; costumes by Bianca Stroock; presented by Paul Streger at the Biltmore Theater Tuesday evening, March 4, 1947. The cast:

Marian Burnett	Edith Atwater
Katy	Joan Vohs
Charles Burnett	Walter Abel
Christine	Carol Wheeler
Eddie West	Richard Noyes
Mike	Frank Wilcox
Lainson	Dennis King Jr.
Mrs. Bright	Dorothy Eaton
Governor Sam Bright	Paul Huber
Mel Granite	Royal Beal

SYNOPSIS: The setting is the living-room of a professor's house in a university town somewhere west of the Missouri River. Act I—Friday evening in October. Act II—The same, immediately after. Act III—The same, immediately after.

New York Post

MARCH 5, 1947

A Liberal Playwright With a Weak Comedy

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

The best and worst that can be said of "Parlor Story," which opened at the Biltmore Theatre last night, is that it is well-meaning. William McCleery, its author, is a conscientious liberal playwright and he has filled his comedy with soundly progressive ideas about academic freedom, freedom of the press, political chicanery, idealism, divorce and the problems of youth and marriage, but his good will is by no means enough to make a good play.

In addition to an unfortunate air of ineffectuality in the treatmen of its commendable ideas, "Parlor Story" suffers from plot trouble. Essentially it is the story of a liberal ex-newspaperman, who is teaching journalism in a state university and of his ambition to become president of the university, while the reactionary publisher, for whom he used to work, is trying to lure him back to save his collapsing newspaper.

Complex Plot

There is a lot more plot to it than that, including the misadventures of a brash young undergraduate suspected of having radical ideas about marriage, and a great deal of rather shadowy maneuvering about a coming gubernatorial election and the control of the reactionary publisher's paper. One reason for not telling more about Mr. McClery's somewhat complex narrative is that I had some difficulty in following its convolutions.

At one point it did seem that the author was on the verge of something pleasantly revolutionary. He was presenting one of those noble and understanding wives, so prevalent in the modern theatre, who is secretly responsible for her husband's political advancement, and for the moment he apparently was bent on showing that she actually made a mess of everything. It would have been a welcome innovation, but he quickly dropped the idea.

The Governor

To the playwright's credit it should be noted that he has the ability to write bright lines, which, although they occasionally have little to do with the play, are amusing in a not-too-unnatural way. Also, while his newspaper publisher is a conventional creation, his politician has a certain freshness. At least, this Governor Sam Bright, though a charlatan and a weakling, has a pleasantly wistful desire to be decent, provided it won't lose him any votes.

The playing is pleasant, if not particularly distinguished. Walter Abel gives his customary attractive performance as the teacher, Edith Atwater is again competent as the wife, and Paul Huber and Royal Beal are helpful as the governor and the publisher. The younger generation is pleasantly presented by Joan Vohs and Carol Wheeler as the teacher's attractive daughters and Richard Noyes as the problem student.

But "Parlor Story," for all its fine intentions, is dull, diffuse and ineffectual.

The Sun

MARCH 5, 1947

'Parlor Story,' Presented at the Biltmore, Discursive and Tedious Comedy.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

William McCleery has written, and Paul Streger has produced, a fumbling and stumbling play in "Parlor Story." It is one in which there is more speech-making than sound playwriting, more attention given to incidental dialogue than to characters and story development. The premiere took place last night at the Biltmore.

This is McCleery's second play. He again shows—he did it in "Hope for the Best"—that he has a facility for sharp cracks, for turning out witty lines; but he lets his social conscience lead into rambling. He makes observations on many subjects—problems of children of divorced parents, teachers' pay, problems of adolescent love—and his play loses in compactness and progression as he veers from one topic to another.

His principal character in "Parlor Story" is that of an ex-editor, teaching journalism west of the Missouri River, who is seeking the presidency of his university. He gets into a political tangle and is pushed around by a powerful publisher and a very weak-willed Governor. But he refuses to compromise and finally wins.

There are several fairly good scenes, but too many dull ones. The most interesting interlude, and one that is well played, indeed, comes along in the third act when the professor straightens out the reasoning of his brightest journalistic student, who has caused some ruction with an indiscreet editorial written for the college paper.

Walter Abel contributes a good performance as the man who prefers teaching to the newspaper business. It's a better-written role than that of the wife, with which Edith Atwater, quite miscast, has something of a struggle. For one thing, she doesn't seem old enough to be the mother of an 18-year-old daughter, and this observation should not disturb her. Richard Noyes does a good job as the liberal-thinking student. Joan Vohs and Carol Wheeler are attractive ingenues. Royal Beal and Paul Huber bang about the stage as two stock characters, those of the publisher and the editor. Dennis King Jr., who was so good in "The Playboy of the Western World," has some feeble comedy as a bumptious state policeman.

"Parlor Story" is a discursive and frequently tedious comedy by a promising young playwright who has a lot to say about the state of the world, but who fails to turn his declamations into good theater. And perhaps the principal fault with "Parlor Story" is that you don't really care whether the professor gets the college presidency or not.

Journal and American

MARCH 5, 1947

'Parlor Story' Opens At Biltmore Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

This William McCleery is an if-at-first-you-don't-succeed playwright. A couple of seasons back, Jean Dalrymple produced his "Hope for the Best" at the Fulton. Franchot Tone and Jane Wyatt were its featured players. Last night, at the Biltmore, Paul Streger produced his "Parlor Story." Walter Abel and Edith Atwater are its leading actors. And Mr. McCleery is still a promising young dramatist.

There is little doubt that William McCleery is a messiah with a message crying to be delivered. In "Hope for the Best," a newspaper columnist yearned to mend his ways and turn from folksy chit-chats to political pronouncements. And, I think, a lovely lady reader came along and, screwing his determination to the sticking point, helped him realize his admirably unmercenary craving.

Last night's "Parlor Story" is a second serving of pretty much the same. This time the columnist has gone to college as a teacher, keeping one eye on the editorship of a local journal, the other on the presidency of the local university. Charles Burnett is already married. But Marian, like her pretty predecessor, is also a lovely lady hell-bent on helping out her man.

She does, too, sparing neither governors, politicos nor collegians to do so. Marian is also no hcarder of the spoken word.

* * *

Many Words Witty

Last night at the Biltmore, now on the morning, afternoon or evening after, I again admit that William McCleery is an if-at-first-you-don't-succeed playwright who's pretty sure to get there. But "Parlor Story" is no vehicle in which he's likely to arrive. There's too much of everything in this second-trying. Much too much of everything except condensation.

In "Parlor Story," even more than in "Hope for the Best," our promising young dramatist seldom makes one word serve when three or four will do. Many of his words are witty. Several of his words are true. A number of his words are needed. But, for the most part, they lose themselves in their own prolixity. Mr. McCleery, as playwright, seems to have no time in which to be concise.

And conciseness is, more than any other thing, what "Parlor Story" needs. The message-laden story of Charles and Marian Burnett; of their daughter Christine and her brilliant Eddie; of the Honorable Sam Bright and his not-so-honorable Mel Granite, could be told in fewer words. Like all good stories, it should start the beginning and stop when it gets to the end.

"Parlor Story" goes on and on long after it has come to its conclusion. Mr. McCleery hates like anything to see the final curtain.

* * *

Acting Excellent

Writing of "Hope for the Best," Burns Mantle pointed out in his year book for 1944-1945 that it would be "a pleasant change for the critics if the plays they were invited to see could be as good as the acting in them." Mr. Mantle might well have been writing prophetically about the "Parlor Story" that was yet to come. For the acting in Mr. McCleery's second-try is excellent.

Walter Abel, absent from Broadway since John van Druten's "The Mermaids Singing," brings actorial skill, personal charm and social understanding to the role of the school-teaching Charlie Burnett. It's not his fault if the man behind the character never quite comes through. And, with considerable less certainty, the same is to be said of Edith Atwater's Marian.

Even so, the evening's honors belong to a lad called Richard Noyes, making his big town debut as Christine's bright young boy-friend. His is a talent to be remembered. Dennis King Jr. is back again as a puddin' headed state trooper. Carol Wheeler is a personable Christine. Under Bretaigne Windust's second-best direction, against Raymond Sovey's second-best setting, the others do what they're told to...

Which, back where we started, is to report that the author of "Parlor Story" is still a promising young playwright with a good play waiting to be written.

New York World-Telegram

MARCH 5, 1947

'Parlor Story' Piles Plot Upon Plot

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

There is enough plot in "Parlor Story" to last a soap opera for a 26-week season. Some of it is good and some of it not so good.

The first two acts are so busy lining up complications on various scores, that like an actor fighting for lines, the audience has to fight to keep the story straight.

When the intricate patterns finally get together in the last act, there are touching and provocative scenes.

A Scoreboard Would Help.

You can understand the bearing of the earlier elements on the final solution, but you have to keep your head to do it. A scoreboard, kept religiously from the beginning, would help.

The play touches on education, politics, polygamy, divorce and journalism, as its more conspicuous themes. It has roughly the plot of a farce, the form of a social drama, the writing of a comedy, and the playing of a little of each.

Charles Burnett is a journalism professor whose wife cannot help meddling in the appointment of the State University presidency which he is about to lose.

A Plan That Backfires.

Her plan backfires most elaborately. He is put in the position of expelling his prospective son-in-law to get the job he wants. The pressures that bring this situation about are far too maselike to describe here. In the end it looks as if the youngster will stay in school and the professor has a good chance to head the university.

Although this is the main plot, a subsidiary story leads to the best scene of the party, both in writing and playing.

Revealing Friction.

When Charles is about to expel young Eddie, and this 19-year-old demands the hand of his daughter, the two come to extraordinary terms. Charles has to admit that he is bound by conventions unweighed since he was a child. And Eddie reveals a long pent-up bitterness as the child of divorced parents.

The relationship between the two is surprising yet remarkably balanced. The precocious youngster and the slightly stodgy adult come into warm and revealing friction.

Walter Abel does a thoroughly workmanlike job on the professor, keeping him calm and as logical as the circumstances allow. Except for a preposterous about-face resulting from an argument with his wife, the character comes through consistently in Abel's hands.

The big surprise of the evening is young Richard Noyes as Eddie. With every chance in the world to be objectionable, smug and prodigious, Noyes makes Eddie every inch a miniature man.

Precise and Charming.

He is confident and precise, completely charming; and plays with a clarity of speech seldom employed by his elders in the theater. And he looks like Van Johnson at Mickey Rooney's age.

Edith Atwater brings warmth and sympathy to the professor's wife, a pretty colorless role. She is at her best arguing and later reconciling with her husband.

Paul Huber is a comical governor who expects only to be pushed around, and Royal Beal is a conniving publisher. Dennis King Jr. is a bumptious state trooper by way of nepotism.

Attractive Daughters.

The professor's daughters are the attractive Joan Vohs and Carol Wheeler.

Raymond Sovey has given to the set that pieced-together look that professor's homes are unfortunately likely to have. Bretaigne Windust seemed over anybody's depth as he tried to point up flashes of humor and understanding with his direction of this encyclopedia of plots.

Daily Mirror

MARCH 5, 1947

'Parlor Story' Gets Off the Target

By ROBERT COLEMAN

In "Parlor Story" William McCleery has penned the story of a man who would rather be right than president—president, that is, of a college somewhere West of the Missouri River. And, before the author gets through with him, he's on the way to being president without sacrificing his integrity.

Our hero, Charles Burnett, is an unusual character. He spurns offers of $20,000 and up as managing editor of newspapers to head a school of journalism at a wage that means patches on his professorial pants.

His wife is the domineering type—a scheming go-getter. She stages a campaign to have him named president of the college where he teaches journalism. The first thing you know their parlor is cluttered up with wacky State Troopers, a press tycoon and a mere Governor.

A checker-like game of give and take and double cross ensues. To better his chances for the big college job, our hero is called upon to expel a student, in love with his daughter, for writing a muddled, daring editorial for the campus paper. He refuses, and, through a chain of dramaturgic machinations, becomes a strong man, a fighting man, a champion of liberalism in politics.

McCleery has a gift for creating interesting characters and for fashioning amusing dialogue. But he lets his characters get into incredible situations and juvenility creep into his wisecracks.

McCleery is at his best when writing simply and resisting the temptation of tricky plotting. There is a scene between the teacher and pupil in the last act that is cincere and deeply moving. There should have been more such scenes and fewer episodes with a hollow, phony ring.

Bretaigne Windust's direction has not been of help to the McCleery script. A director was required who would wield a judicious blue pencil as well as get the actors on and off the Biltmore's stage as realistically as possible.

To act "Parlor Story" producer Paul Streger has engaged such capables as Edith Atwater, Walter Abel, Carol Wheeler, Richard Noyes, Royal Beal, Dorothy Eaton, Paul Huber, Joan Vohs, Frank Wilcox and Dennis King, Jr.

That it is not acted with more distinction is due, we believe, primarily to director Windust and author McCleery.

Young Noyes, who, according to a program note, served in the Army Air Forces, looks like a younger edition of Mickey Rooney. The film scouts should be camping on his doorstep. Miss Vohs is a good looking alumna of modeling and the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes.

"Parlor Story," in sum, is a play with an honest viewpoint that gets bogged down in the quicksands of arbitrary construction and obvious laughs. McCleery aims admirably, but shoots suspect arrows that too often fly wide of their target.

DAILY NEWS

MARCH 5, 1947

'Parlor Story' a Sample of the Unimportance of Being Earnest

By JOHN CHAPMAN

One of the characters in "Parlor Story," which was presented last evening at the Biltmore Theatre, is a lad who looks and acts the way Skeets Miller used to look and act when Skeets, the intrepid boy journalist, squiggled into a cave to interview Floyd Collins.

This youth in the play is editor of a college paper and he has just written a humdinger of an editorial on the subject of marriage. He knows nothing of marriage and perhaps as little of sex, but nevertheless he has sounded off. In the play it is made clear that there is nothing wrong in the boy's having done this; his motives are high and only his experience and his judgment are lacking.

The same may be said of William McCleery, author of "Parlor Story." His motives are high and he has sounded off on marriage, sex, politics, divorce, journalism and education. He has a right to do so and should be given every encouragement. I only wish that I could afford him more encouragement than I feel able to bestow this morning—which is a pat on the head for some pretty good dialogue, another pat on the head for noble intent and a mild expression of faith in his future as a dramatist. Mr. McCleery still could do with some more experience and a colder judgment.

Covers Wide Territory.

"Parlor Story" starts out as the tale of a good newspaperman who has given up practical journalism to teach the young in a western college. His ambition is to be named president of the college by the governor of the state.

From this beginning Mr. McCleery introduces a vote-getting governor, an ambitious state trooper who interferes with civil liberties, two precocious teen-age maidens, the aforementioned boy journalist, a cold-blooded newspaper publisher and the loyally conniving wife of the high-minded gent who wants to be president of the college.

I shall not burden you with the plot, except to report that right and Young Love prevail, in about equal measure, over machine politics and predatory journalism. If you asked for more than this you would be nuts because as things stand it is too much for one play.

The company is pleasant, and under the direction of Bretaigne Windust the players get some amusing moments out of the author's real if erratic gift for dialogue. Walter Abel behaves modestly and amiably as the college prof, Edith Atwater makes him a handsome wife, Dennis King Jr. is a cossack state trooper and Paul Huber a machine-made machine politician.

Richard Noyes, Carol Wheeler, Joan Vohs, Frank Wilcox, Dorothy Eaton and Royal Beal complete the cast. The setting is by Raymond Sovey.

PM

MARCH 6, 1947

A Plot Which Leaves Little Time For Comedy

PM Reviews

In what would seem to be an attempt to mate *State of the Union* with *Kiss and Tell*, William McCleery has written a play which is neither fish nor fowl and rarely good red meat. Listed as a comedy, it is more talky than funny. Touching on such subjects as journalism, politics, teaching and the effect of divorce on children, most of its comments are neither particularly original nor pointed.

Mr. McCleery has burdened himself with a complicated plot involving a liberal journalism professor who would like to be appointed president of his university, a reactionary newspaper publisher who controls the appointment, a well-meaning but "practical" state governor and an allegedly intellectual young journalism student who has written an editorial denouncing marriage. To create his basic complication, he also uses the traditional wife who intends to help her husband with plots of her own. Before he begins to weave together the threads of what has been occasionally amusing, but seemingly aimless, conversation, the better part of two acts have been used up. Once he has establishd the direction of his action, Mr. McCleery moves along fairly effectively but the time he has spent laying the groundwork for his complications develops more ennui than anticipation.

• • •

If he had been willing to settle for less plot, both Mr. McCleery and the audience might have been happier. He seems most at home in

"Parlor Story"—*continued*

conversational give and take. He has points to make on a variety of subjects, but the points are blunted by the exigencies of the omniverous plot. Torn between his interests and his self-imposed requirements, he prods his people about in uncertain fashion, now taking a hesitant step toward comedy, then looking hopefully toward drama. But he is baffled in either event, for his comic inventiveness is limited and most of his characters, though modified to some semblance of reality, are still cut from such stock patterns as to be unable to carry dramatic weight.

* * *

In the professor, his central character, Mr. McCleery has created a developed and convincing individual, a role which gains added stature from Walter Abel's accomplished playing. Edith Atwater is handsome and helpful as the wife. Royal Beal and Paul Huber bring professional polish to roles which offer opportunity for little more and Richard Noyes, as the journalism student, rises to a moment of glory in one of the play's best scenes.

Bretaigne Windust's direction seems little more than routine. It is this quality of routine construction which characterizes the entire production—writing, direction and, to some extent, the acting. It has sufficient surface to take a slight polish, but it is veneer, and thin veneer at that. —JOHN S. WILSON

Louis Kronenberger, PM's regular theater critic, is confined to his home with the grippe.

The New York Times

MARCH 5, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

For the purposes of universal contentment, William McCleery should not wrap up a rather dreary problem play in such attractive clothing. In his second drama, "Parlor Story," which was put on at the Biltmore last evening, he is demonstrating the moral value of being fearless and honest. Since he makes his point by slide-rule mechanics, one is none too sure at the conclusion that honesty has won the battle honestly, without the use of brass-knuckles backstage. Although Mr. McCleery is honesty's advocate, he is an opportunist as a playwright, and his hero has to be as clever as a playwright to rise to honor in a dishonest world.

As a writer, apart from being a contriver of plots, Mr. McCleery is winning and unhackneyed. He has written some of the most beguiling dialogue of the season. His attitude toward his younger characters is thoroughly refreshing to playgoers accustomed to the mechanical cheapness of most popular plays. Keep Mr. McCleery out of the sorry business of putting a plot together and you have an especially attractive writer for the stage.

* * *

This is the story of a college professor who wants very much to be president of the university in which he is teaching somewhere west of the Missouri River. Without being a prig, Charles Burnett is a man of high principles. The office of president is a political appointment and the governor wants to use it to win votes in the impending election. Without the use of a chart in an adjoining column it would be difficult to explain how Burnett gets the job.

But it is not very difficult to say a few words in gratitude for the warmth and humor of the Bennett family, and something in admiration for the talk of the Burnett daughers, who are in their teens, and Eddie West, also in his teens, who wants to marry one of them. Being a tolerant person, Burnett lets the young folks run on at will on love, marriage, flirtation technique, divorce and other profound subjects.

This is where McCleery's talent is most conspicuous. For his scenes between Burnett and the young people are not only light and humorous, but occasionally touching, and the emotion is spontaneous and genuine. Obviously Burnett is the head of his household, but the young people talk so logically and ardently that neither he nor you can ever be sure that they do not actually hold the whip hand in arguments. These gusty and billowing scenes deserve a play that is not so rigidly tied down to the stage.

* * *

Years ago Walter Abel used to be a pretty solemn actor, with gestures that never really got released. You should now see him play the part of Charles Burnett with an undercurrent of droll humor and with a sincerity that is human and alive. Put it down as a little gem of comedy acting by a man of taste and skill. As Mrs. Burnett, Edith Atwater is also giving an attractive and animated performance superior to any of her previous work.

The roles of the children are delightfully played by Joan Vohs and Carol Wheeler, and particularly by Richard Noyes, who has a long, well-defined part which he acts with extraordinary resourcefulness, depending less on his youth than his ability. Paul Huber plays the governor with comic indecision, and Royal Beal plays the monstrous newspaper publisher with weary perfidiousness. As an overeager State trooper Dennis King Jr. is bumptiously amusing, and Frank Wilcox is excellent as a more mature and cautious cop. To give everyone the proper setting, Raymony Sovey has designed a combination living-room and hall that is not too grubby for a college professor on a State salary.

As director Bretaigne Windust has been kind to the characters, which are the best things "Parlor Story" has to offer. He has suffered the little children to behave like human beings; a less-sensitive director would have typed them as brat. But neither Mr. Windust nor Mr. McCleery has succeeded in getting that plot off the stage and over the footlights. It weighs a ton; and it is haunted by ghosts of many problem playwrights from the last generation.

"The Importance of Being Earnest"

New York Herald Tribune

MARCH 4, 1947

By HOWARD BARNES

Captivating Revival

JOHN GIELGUD'S season of comedy at the Royale Theater has opened felicitously with a captivating revival of "The Importance of Being Earnest." The English actor-manager has assembled a knowing cast for the Oscar Wilde farce. He has staged it for fun, with a keen sense of social satire and tongue-in-cheek posturings when the play has so demanded. With the handsome Motley decor, his offering has style, wit and tremendous theatrical elan. Wilde may have written "a trivial comedy for serious people," but its fanciful and humorous inflections have been captured at every turn in this first of several Gielgud donations to the current season.

* * *

To the great credit of the star, he performs the leading role with diffident elegance. Doubtless aware that "The Importance of Being Earnest" was a fragile stage work at best, he has exposed it in all its pompous and archaic 19th century mannerisms. His playing of John Worthing, the foundling who invented a brother and found him a real person, is brilliant and sardonic, but he has always ceded the footlights to his co-players when the occasion has demanded. Since they are uniformly excellent in bandying repartee or sustaining a lampoon, the production is all of a piece and has very few dull moments.

* * *

It is so easy to charge the Wilde work with being brittle that it is a pleasure to see how Gielgud has made capital of that very quality. The dramatist wrote of considerably more than odd characters in his travesty of social nonsense. The current revival, sponsored by the Theater Guild and John C. Wilson, recaptures the mood as well as the wit of the piece with extraordinary effect. Whether old Lady Bracknell is lashing out at conventions she scrupulously observes, or Worthing's ward, Cecily is concocting an engagement with a man she has never seen in her diary, "The Importance of Being Earnest" is both true and amusing.

* * *

Margaret Rutherford affords the chief support to Gielgud as the imperious harridon who refuses to allow her daughter to marry Worthing until she discovers that he is a very proper young man indeed. There is not a Wildean phrase which escapes rich interpretation in her hands. Pamela Brown is excellent as her chin-in-air child and Jane Baxter is charming as the ward. Meanwhile Robert Flemyng is fine as the unsuspected brother of the hero and Jean Cadell and John Kidd add robust humor in the parts of a governess and a rector. "The Importance of Being Earnest" is definitely trivial, but it is enchanting to witness as Geilgud has brought it to the Royale.

'THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST.'

Play by Oscar Wilde; staged by John Gielgud; settings by Motley; lighting by William Conway; presented by the Theater Guild and John C. Wilson, in association with H. M. Tennant, Ltd., of London, at the Royale Theater, Monday evening, March 3, 1947. The cast:

Lane ..... Richard Wordsworth
Algernon Moncrieff ..... Robert Flemyng
John Worthing, J.P. ..... John Gielgud
Lady Bracknell ..... Margaret Rutherford
Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax ..... Pamela Brown
Cecily Cardew ..... Jane Baxter
Miss Prism ..... Jean Cadell
Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D. ..... John Kidd
Merriman ..... Stringer Davis
Footman ..... Donald Bain

SYNOPSIS: Act I—Algernon Moncrieff's rooms in Piccadilly. Act II—The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton. Act III—Morning room at the Manor House, Woolton.

New York Post

MARCH 4, 1947

Oscar Wilde and John Gielgud Have Evening of Triumph

By Richard Watts Jr.

There couldn't be anything in the theatre much more delightful than John Gielgud's enchanting production of Oscar Wilde's masterpiece of artificial comedy, "The Importance of Being Earnest," which came to town last night amid cheers and genuflections. The English stage can do certain things incomparably, and the grace, style and wonderful comic dexterity demonstrated in the playing of this particularly engaging minor classic proved it with beautiful conclusiveness.

This reviewer had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Gielgud's production in London during the war and reported at the time that it was something memorable, but plays have an unhappy tendency to suffer a change for the worse in transit between England and America, and I found myself worrying about the possible ill effects of an ocean voyage on so delicate and specialized a theatrical triumph. I needn't have worried. "The Importance of Being Earnest" is just as fine on Broadway as it seemed in the West End.

Wilde's World

For one thing, it is unquestionably a winning and fascinating comedy, if only for its zestful creation of that wonderful Wildean world of wit, beauty, charm and grace, where every man is debonair and epigrammatic and every woman lovely, save the dowagers who are witty and greatly enjoy their own paradoxes. How pleasant that world can be has already been demonstrated this season by the excellent production of "Lady Windermere's Fan," but "The Importance of Being Earnest" is a much superior comedy and its performance has greater style.

Indeed, the acting is not very far from perfection. I, for one, have occasionally found myself in the embarrassing position of being unable to join in the general enthusiasm for Mr. Gielgud's acting and was decidedly a skeptic about his much-applauded portrayal of Hamlet. But all the qualities that seemed to me unfortunate in his Hamlet fit in superbly with the gracefully artificial style of a Wilde comedy, and it is difficult to imagine a more satisfying example of actor, role and play in complete harmony.

The Cast

The only other member of the London cast to make the journey to New York is Jean Cadell, who is a joy as Miss Prism, the most absent-minded governess outside of Gilbert and Sullivan. I missed Edith Evans as the redoubtable Lady Bracknell, because she is one of the great actresses of the world and was at her best in "The Importance of Being Earnest," but Margaret Rutherford, who was the medium in the London production of Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit," is splendid in the part.

Pamela Brown and Jane Baxter, who has a pleasant way of reminding one in voice and appearance of Geraldine Fitzgerald, are humorously charming as the two heroines, and there is an excellent portrayal of the play's second hero by Robert Flemyng. John Kidd is of vast help in the minor role of the rector, and Motley's sets and costumes are lovely.

Good as the individual performances are, it is the teamwork of the cast that contributes chiefly to a memorable production and an evening of theatrical delight.

DAILY NEWS

MARCH 4, 1947

John Gielgud and Company Offer An Engaging Oscar Wilde Revival

By JOHN CHAPMAN

John Gielgud and a fellow band of prissy players have come here from London to present Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest," and their offering is one of considerable, if quiet, delight. Not one of Mae West's familiars could ever peel a grape with the delicatesse with which Mr. Gielgud peels a lemon-yellow glove, nor can Noel Coward turn a phrase more sharply than did Mr. Wilde.

Mr. Coward was moderately evident in last night's first audience at the Royale Theatre, and as I contemplated his suntanned presence during intermissions I thought of a line from "King Lear," a play which Wilde did not admire, to the effect that the wheel has come full circle.

In writing "The Importance of Being Earnest" the irrepressible Oscar did farcical things to the drawing-room formulas of Pinero and Jones. His dialogue was brilliant and his plot was nonsense. Now, in this revival, his dialogue remains brilliant and his plot still is silly—and I have a feeling that he wrote it just to bedevil Noel Coward. Here are Gertrude Lawrence and Clifton Webb and all the butlers, maids and persons of quality whom we have come to know so well.

Crisp Playing.

Mr. Gielgud and company are presenting their comedy with fine, crisp style. They have not the benefit of the elaborate and stunning costumes and sets of the other current Wilde comedy, "Lady Windermere's Fan," and I think it is to their advantage. They must make their way as actors, and they propose to do so. There is not one of them who is not amusing.

It is customary to report that Oscar Wilde's dialogue is brilliant—and so it is, if you leave out some lousy puns about "misanthrope" and "womanthrope." The jokes are stated quickly and cleanly, and the jabs at polite society are deftly thrust home. The humor has aged remarkably little—and the players are up to it.

Mr. Gielgud and Robert Flemyng are a proper pair of wench-bent dandies and Pamela Brown and Jane Baxter are a comparable pair of dandy-bent wenches. I grew inordinately fond of Miss Brown's performance as a young lady of quality. Margaret Rutherford has a fat time in the fat part of Lady Bracknell, Jean Cadell is admirable as a Victorian governess, and John Kidd is an effective lampoon of a British clergyman.

Although the plot of "The Importance of Being Earnest" is no more profound than that of Victor Herbert's "Sweethearts," the way it is written remains fresh and the way it is played by Mr. Gielgud's company makes it a good thing to see.

The New York Times

MARCH 4, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Owing to unavoidable circumstances, this department cannot solemnly swear that John Gielgud's performance of "The Importance of Being Earnest" is immeasurably superior to the original performance in 1895. Even Mr. Gielgud, wise though he is, cannot know that from personal observation. But traditions grow slowly, and it is highly unlikely that the original actors blessed Oscar Wilde's comedy with the knowing perfection that Mr. Gielgud and his colleagues are bestowing on it.

Having played "The Importance" triumphantly in London, Mr. Gielgud has now brought it across the Atlantic with no appreciable seachange—not, let it be said, with the entire original cast, but with superb players of artificial comedy, and they all set it meticulously on the stage of the Royale last evening. By the accuracy and uniformity of their style in acting, directing and setting they transmute a somewhat mechanical comedy into a theatre masterpiece.

* * *

Even when it was new, to judge by the records, "The Importance of Being Earnest" seemed mechanically contrived in plot and dialogue. It was a bit like Gilbert without the Sullivan music. Especially in the central parts of the second act the brilliance of the wit today shines with an effort as though Wilde were puffing a little.

That might be a point worth dwelling upon in a performance less stylized than Mr. Gielgud's. But he has approached it as if it were a score to be played for its own sake as artificial comedy without laying emphasis on the plot and without speaking the lines like jokes or deliberate rejoinders. Absurdly self-conscious, dry and arrogant, Mr. Gielgud and his associates are marvelously entertaining. In the purest meaning of the word they are "playing" Oscar Wilde. Nothing here is seriously intended except the manner of the comedy.

* * *

Notice how all the actors hold their heads high as though they were elevating themselves above vulgarity. Notice how they greet each other with dainty touches of the fingers, avoiding at all costs the heartiness of a handshake. The lines of dialogue are written elaborately; each word is carefully chosen for its satiric value; by

modern standards, some of the lines are long. But notice how disdainfully these actors speak them. Instead of hammering away at the jokes, they speak dryly in an insufferable fashion, as perhaps Oscar Wilde spoke when he, too, had a large, admiring audience at some fashionable reception.

As John Worthing, who has invented a dissolute brother, Mr. Gielgud plays with an ascetic arrogance that is enormously witty quite apart from the dialogue. No play could ever match the sustained perfection of his stylized acting. But this is no exercise in star-casting. For Mr. Gielgud has surrounded himself with actors who have mastered the same attitudes. As the overbearing Lady Bracknell, Margaret Rutherford is tremendously skillful—the speaking, the walking and the wearing of costumes all gathered up into one impression of insufferability.

* * *

Pamela Brown plays Gwendolen with the same icy condescension. As the more rustic Cecily, Jane Baxter is lovely and full of merriment in a more humane style. Jean Cadell is playing the spinster Schoolma'm with an acidulously sweet and nervous virtue. Robert Flemyng's Algernon Moncrieff is an excellent foil for Mr. Gielgud's John Worthing. Without rubbing the edge off the style, Mr. Moncrieff gets a dash of well-bred revelry into his acting. As the bachelor's servant, Richard Wordsworth is also immensely expert; and John Kidd is delightfully dull and fatuous as the rector.

Especially for the two interiors Motley's settings are models of period décor; they can be played against without staring the acting out of countenance or overwhelming the performance with color. The costumes, which presumably Motley has also designed, convey the character of the parts and the satire of the comedy without sacrificing beauty. What Motley has accomplished completes Mr. Gielgud's design for artificial comedy. Like the play, it is inhuman. It sacrifices personality to style—detached, egotistical, condescending, arid, satirical and marvelously enjoyable.

Daily Mirror

MARCH 4, 1947

Gielgud's 'Earnest' A Rare Treat

By ROBERT COLEMAN

No season in memory has brought a more delightful production than John Gielgud's "The Importance of Being Earnest," which arrived at the Royale Theatre last evening under auspices of the Theatre Guild and John C. Wilson.

Gielgud not only distinguishes himself as an actor, but as director, too. He has assembled an admirable cast and coached it to perfection in the tricky ways of the comedy of manners. Brittle, crisp, flawlessly paced, the production, we are sure, would have won the approval of the exacting Oscar Wilde had he been alive to see it.

Opinions differ on the merits of Wilde's plays. Personally, we have always considered "The Importance of Being Earnest" a shade inferior to "Lady Windermere's Fan," and thought "A Woman of No Importance" the best of the comic trio. But so ingratiating is the Gielgud staging of "Earnest" that it is calculated to upend objective criticism.

A plot that would be downright silly in less capable hands becomes not only acceptable but immensely enjoyable when graced with Wilde's sparkling, quotable dialogue. It is gorgeously satiric, revealing dialogue, but it never seems bitter and lacking in compassion.

Gielgud is masterful as the John Worthing who assumed the name of Earnest the better to win the hand of Gwendolyn Fairfax, who had confidence in men named Earnest. And Robert Flemyng offers a fitting companion piece as the Algernon Moncrief who also would be Earnest to please John's ward, Cecily.

Margaret Rutherford dominates several scenes as that invincible battleship of a woman, Lady Bracknell, who knows what constitutes a good, if not a happy, match. Pamela Brown and Jane Baxter are charming as Gwendolyn and Cecily.

Miss Brown's diction and manner of speech are somehow reminiscent of a highbrow Mae West's. There were some in the audience last evening who kept expecting her to interject a refined "Come up and see me sometime" into the proceedings.

Jean Cadell and John Kidd are good in the roles of Miss Prism and the Rev. Canon Chasuble.

The decor by Motley complements the play beautifully.

When this season has passed from the stage, it will hardly be remembered for the number or quality of new plays it has given us. But we shall recall fondly the quantity and merits of the revivals it has provided.

And none of the revivals has challenged "The Importance of Being Earnest" for exquisite taste. It offers a witty and intelligent evening in the theatre. Be grateful for it and embrace it affectionately.

PM EXCLUSIVE

MARCH 5, 1947

Kronenberger

A Brilliant Revival Of a Brilliant Farce

John Gielgud's production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a delight. Indeed, if I may be autobiographical for a moment, it passed the final test, Monday night, of keeping me enormously entertained while I was coming down with a first-rate case of grippe.

The Importance of Being Earnest is by all odds Wilde's stage masterpiece—a play in which, for once, he surrendered to his own genius for absurdity and used his wit to create something unique rather than to brighten something trashy. The tale, with its babies found in handbags and its young men who invent invalid friends and black-sheep brothers, must be accepted on its own terms. To complain that it is trivial or artificial or lacking in meaning would be like complaining that fireworks are trivial or artificial or lacking in meaning. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a pure though a very special kind of farce—one which must seem to wear the mantle, and always employ the manner, of drawing-room comedy. Indeed, the manner must be even tonier, after the fashion of the very grandest hoaxing; for Wilde, while out-Gilberting Gilbert in plot, was out-Congreving Congreve in language.

* * *

Mr. Gielgud and his company know exactly how to play the thing. They breathe life into it by keeping Life out of it, by treating its nonsense with solemn, high-handed verve. Yet, except toward the end, they never for a moment concede that it is nonsense. In the last act they do let the lid fly off, and strike burlesque attitudes of period emotion; but by then they have the play safely home and the broader treatment, if still questionable, does add a certain fillip.

* * *

And with the cast knowing their business, the play is very often extremely funny. On other occasions when I saw *The Importance of Being Earnest*, it was played too much for routine farce and fell pretty flat. But Monday night, with wit and manner obtaining their due, not only the big scenes but many of the stray lines fetched up laughs, and even the too-famous epigrams seemed less a problem than usual. And in his staging, Mr. Gielgud has contributed some excellent bits of business.

* * *

In his acting Mr. Gielgud plays John Worthing with high-comedy address and aplomb; and carries off his greatest moment—his appearance in deep mourning for his non-existent dead brother—with distinguished grief. Margaret Rutherford plays Lady Bracknell to the hilt, in wonderful get-ups and with all her imperious, insolent worldliness. Pamela Brown's Gwendolen is a gem of controlled highfalutin; and in their rather less mannered roles, Jane Baxter and Robert Flemyng are a very pleasant Cecily and Algernon. Jean Cadell, looking rather like an angular Ethel Barrymore, is a very good Miss Prism, and John Kidd closes the ranks as a sound Chasuble. The Motley sets are an additional good point of what is the season's most expert revival. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York World-Telegram

MARCH 4, 1947

Wilde Play Revival A Slick Production

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

John Gielgud and a fine company are giving Wilde's "Importance of Being Earnest" a memorable performance. Theirs is a mature and sophisticated approach that wrings the slyest wit out of the 50-year-old comedy.

Plays of that age are riddled with pitfalls, in that superficially they invite exaggeration which makes them grotesque, or inspire an awe that makes them ponderous. Gielgud has found and adhered to a fine line of exquisite satire.

He has maintained Wilde's caustic comment on the manners of his period, and added a perspective of his own on the period itself. The result is a beautifully balanced work of theatrical art.

Reflects Manners of Day.

It is easy to accept the plot of a play like "Earnest" as a flimsy framework on which the author can hang a series of examples of his paradoxical wit. But the brittle story is derived as much from the manners of the day as the language and comment.

Speeches may appear to be effectively contrived nonsense. Actually their content is the same as that of indulgent people's babble in any time, but here phrased by genius.

As Gielgud has presented this play, it does not frequently make you burst with laughter. You more often relish and savor its talk with astonishment and delight.

Subdued Behind Style.

The secret of this would seem to be that no one is allowed to act as if he thought he was funny. The art of the comedian is most certainly present, but it is subdued behind style. The play is richly mannered and tastefully reserved.

"The Importance of Being Earnest" is a warm relic of escape. Everybody is well off. The younger generation falls in love at first sight. The only problem is to prove that one meets with society's requirements for the proposed match.

To meet a young lady Algernon pretends to be John's imaginary brother Earnest, an identity John assumes when he wishes to get away from home for a fling. It is enough about the plot to tell that Algernon is forgiven, and it is proven that John actually is Earnest.

An Elegant Wastrel.

Gielgud is a model of an elegant wastrel, a bored and languishing young man. It is a picturesque performance, but John is no less a part of the whole play than any other character. It is as director that the star stands out.

Set in a wise mood, the play is gilded with bright touches. There is Cecily's use of the calling card, and Gwendolyn's of the parasol, the strolling of Chasuble and Miss Prism, and the two arguments over the tea table, to keep the show tantalizingly embroidered.

Margaret Rutherford is a magnificently snobbish Lady Bracknell. She resembles a grand dame of the bulldog breed and conducts herself with the same tenacity. Without batting an eye she pronounces the most preposterous social dicta, and poses questions which from anyone less solemnly sure would be outrageously insulting.

Charming and Stylish.

As the two girls, Pamela Brown and Jane Baxter are charming and stylish, and always within the frame. Miss Brown has the trick of complete allure while promising to turn into a stencil of her Lady mother. Miss Baxter proves that a fortune need be no hazard to wit, will or gentility. She has a startling resemblance to Dorothy Lamour.

Robert Flemyng is a jaunty Algernon, an easy going cynic, and brings the part a properly filial balance of sympathy and contrast to Gielgud's John.

Jean Cadell is a wisp of dainty genteelness as Miss Prism, and John Kidd plays Chasuble with a gay-dog wink in his canonical eye.

Journal-American

MARCH 4, 1947

Gielgud Troupe Offers Wilde Play at Royale

By ROBERT GARLAND

It's been some time since Oscar Wilde had two plays running simultaneously on Broadway. Now, to make up for our neglectfulness, "Lady Windermere's Fan" is at the Cort, "The Importance of Being Earnest" is at the Royale.

No less a barnstorming Britisher than London's John Gielgud has fetched the last-named into the very playhouse where, 20 years ago, it was sore beset by the music of Robert Hood Bowers and the John Worthing of Hal Forde.

Last night's surprise was the discovery that, in the hands of Cornelia Otis Skinner and her Americans, "Lady Windermere's Fan" holds up better than "The Importance of Being Earnest" holds up in the hands of the visiting Englanders.

You would—you did. If you tell the truth—expect it to be the other way around. But no! Where, at the Cort, the elder comedy is a brilliant portrait of its period, the younger, at the Royale, is something else again.

It's all a matter of playing. Last night's performance was too deliberate. Or maybe "studied" is the word I need. And it wasn't all pitched in the same key. The players ranged from comedy to farce, then back to comedy.

They weren't able to make up their minds, it seemed. Or, as their director, Mr. Gielgud wasn't able to make up their minds for them.

* * *

Fine Breakfast Fare

In the Oscar Wilde chronology, "The Importance of Being Earnest" is preceded not only by the revival at the Cort, but also by "A Woman of No Importance" and "An Ideal Husband" which Russell Lewis and Howard Young have on their producing minds.

When taken down from your library shelves, it makes better reading than the others. Yesterday morning at the Edison, it read more amusingly than it acted last night at the Royale. Over rolls, coffee and monthly bills, it was fine breakfast fun.

Not that the Mayfairy story of Algernon and Cecily, John and Gwendolen, their menservants, governesses, rectors and Aunt Augusta, is anything to occupy a morning, afternoon or evening.

But their conversation is! In "The Importance of Being Earnest," Wilde-cracks abound. Most of them are excellent, many of them are brilliant, most of them are well known. Several of them go deep enough to be true.

It is these Wilde-cracks that lend flavor to the not very interesting, entirely unconvincing story of "the thoughtful young man who invents a sick friend on whom to blame his own peccadillos." A story that bites itself before it ends.

Even so, the conversation between John Worthing and Lady Bracknell concerning the former's parentage remains comically superb.

* * *

All Off Balance

John Gielgud, long absent from our Broadway scene, takes over the leading role of the Honorable John Worthing of the Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire, England. Under his own direction, he plays it as comedy, farce, burlesque.

It was his recurrent change of mood that put me off last night at the Royale. By the time I had adjusted myself to Mr. Gielgud's comedy, it had changed to farce. Adjusted then to farce, Mr. Gielgud went in for spoofing.

Disturbing this comical, farcical, slap-stickial interplay. Disturbing to playgoers down in the audience, and players up on the stage. Frankly, "The Importance of Being Earnest" deserves more consistent treatment.

As Algernon Moncrieff, Roberi Flemyng is more as he should be. As Gwendolen Fairfax and Cecily Cardew, Pamela Brown and Jane Baxter are for the most part in the picture. The Rev. Canon Chasuble of John Kidd is what we Americans call vaudeville.

By this time you've suspected that I was disappointed in the John Gielgud revival of the Oscar Wilde "Importance of Being Earnest." I was! Even Margaret Rutherford's Lady Bracknell wasn't everything I'd hoped for...

As a show to see on Broadway, "The Importance of Being Earnest" should be superior to "Lady Windermere's Fan." Right now, it isn't. It'll serve nicely, however, until William Congreve's "Love for Love" shows up in April.

The Sun

MARCH 4, 1947

'The Importance of Being Earnest' Played Delightfully by Gielgud's Company.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

John Gielgud's season began last night at the Royale, and Broadway is all the better because of it. Oscar Wilde's gay, absurd and artificial farce, "The Importance of Being Earnest," provides a thoroughly delightful evening. These visitors can act!

Wilde's 52-year-old comedy is a play of impudence and nonsense, of deceptions and pretentions, manners and ill-manners, and all the hocus-pocus of mistaken identity, and it calls for meticulous stylized playing. Well, it certainly gets it from Gielgud and his London players, who have come to stay with us for thirteen weeks. It will be all right with me if they never go back.

They play the now somewhat venerable "Earnest" for all of its complete unreality. They play it ardently and artfully and zestfully, and as skillful professionals who know just what to do with expressions and inflections, with a word, a line, a scene. And it is apparent all the way that Gielgud has been as scrupulous with his direction as he is with his own performance.

He performs brilliantly as Worthing, who uses the name of John in the propriety of the country and that of Ernest in his more rakish moments in the city, and in Robert Flemyng he has a facile actor to go right along with him. Flemyng had the sure touch for comedy when he was here with Katharine Cornell. He still has it.

Pamela Brown, airy, arch and precise, and the decorative Jane Baxter, both up to their pretty ears in epigrams, are exactly right as Gwendolen and Cecily. It's their New York debut and the town is hereby turned over to them. Margaret Rutherford, with a lot of Wilde to speak in her two appearances, plays the vigilant Lady Bracknell and does a great deal with and for her scenes. And, incidentally, for the play, which needs helping along now and then.

Jean Cadell, who was with us in the era when "Bunty Pulls the Strings" was the Scottish rage of Broadway, is excellent as Miss Prism. So are Richard Wordsworth, playing Algernon's manservant, and John Kidd, in the role of the Rev. Chasuble, D. D. The cast, then, is one of quality.

The elegant costumes and settings by Motley are in keeping with the mood of the play and the spirit of the playing.

"The Importance of Being Earnest," as done with the precision and charm that the Gielgud company bestows upon it, provides enchanting theater; it's something for no one to miss. The play was received last night by a spectacular audience which included many persons who have seen it numerous times. But the evening's distinguished playgoer who knows it best, and who has the greatest appreciation of it, saw and enjoyed the performance from the second row in the balcony. She knows it because she played it in 1902.

Her name is Margaret Anglin.

"Yellow Jack"

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 28, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Nothing has happened in the last dozen years to alter the initial impression that "Yellow Jack" is an enterprising and original drama. The late Sidney Howard, who had one of the keenest minds in the modern theatre, wrote it in collaboration with Paul de Kruif to honor the heroism of the men who solved the secret of yellow fever after the Spanish-American War.

The millions of Americans who enthusiastically failed to see it when it was first produced now have a second opportunity at the International Theatre, where the American Repertory Company put it on last evening. The original production, which was staged by Guthrie McClintic with a distinguished cast, seemed bizarre to many people because it was not literal. In the meantime the theatre has become less rigid in style and has had the stimulus of Living Newspaper technique. Although the current performance, staged by Martin Ritt, is no parody of the Living Newspaper, it has some of the same terseness and directness in its narrative statement. Well acted with a minimum of heroics, it emerges as a refreshing and engrossing production.

* * *

To Mr. Howard the medical research into the cause of yellow fever after the Spanish-American War was one of the great chapters in the saga of science. In "Yellow Jack" he told it with admiration of the courage and scientific passion of Walter Reed and his associates. Brief scenes in the laboratory in the first part of the play show the frustration of the technicians and record Dr. Reed's suspicion that a mosquito carried the plague. Since yellow fever is, the play says, a disease confined to humans, experiments could be conducted on human beings only. This supplies the heroic qualities of this record of research.

Sometimes "Yellow Jack" does seem a little gaudy with its emotions and the heroics more theatrical than human. For the terse style, as contrasted with a fuller and more leisurely style, makes for headline melodrama, which is not precisely what Mr. Howard wanted. There are perils in underwriting, too; eloquence is often more reticent than crispness. But the gaudy sections are minor defects in a drama full of intellectual curiosity. Now and then it produces scenes of theatrical excitement, and the whole conception of the play touches the fringe of nobility. What Dr. Reed and his associates accomplished deserves this belated salute in the theatre.

* * *

Having temporarily abandoned the repertory schedule, the ART is staging "Yellow Jack" as virtually an independent production. Only two of the chief ART actors are playing in this performance—Philip Bourneuf and Victor Jory. They are the best actors in the cast. Mr. Bourneuf is playing the crotchety and bitter Dr. Carlos Finlay; and Mr. Jory is playing the explosive character of James Carroll, one of the research doctors. Both of these actors give the performance color and substance.

* * *

As the excitable and venturesome Dr. Lazear, who gave his life to the experiment, Alfred Ryder is giving an interesting performance of temperament and recklessness. Raymond Greenleaf is excellent as the reserved, earnest and courageous Dr. Reed. Efrem Zimbalist Jr. is giving a good performance as the Cuban Dr. Agramonte. In the only woman's part in the drama, Anne Jackson is giving a sincere and humane performance as a nurse.

Wolfgang Roth has designed a functional setting that has the happy effect of throwing the emphasis on the acting without being precious in its conception or rendering. No doubt the performance will acquire greater fluidity in the next few days. Some of the emotional scenes appear to be shrill and splintery. But most of the performance is a clear, stimulating narrative of one of the great moments in the battle for human living.

'YELLOW JACK.'

Play by Sidney Howard, in collaboration with Paul deKruif; staged by Martin Ritt; production designed by Wolfgang Roth; music arranged by Lehman Engel; presented by the American Repertory Theater, Inc., at the International Theater, Thursday evening, February 27, 1947. The cast:

O'Hara	Arthur Keegan
McClelland	William Windom
Busch	Eli Wallach
Brinkerhof	John Becher
Miss Blake	Anne Jackson
Walter Reed	Raymond Greenleaf
Aristides Agramonte	Efrem Zimbalist Jr.
James Carroll	Victor Jory
Colonel Tory	John Straub
Wm. Crawford Gorgas	Eugene Stuckman
Jesse W. Lazear	Alfred Ryder
Roger P. Ames	Emery Battis
Major Cartwright	Angus Cairns
Dr. Carlos Finlay	Philip Bourneuf
William H. Dean	Robert Rawlings
An Army Chaplain	Donald Keyes
A Commissary Sergeant	Ed Woodhead

Soldiers, orderlies, &c.: Don Allen, John Behney, Michele Corhan, Will Davis, Thomas Grace, Bart Henderson, Fred Hunter, Robert Lasor, Gerald McCormack, Walter Neal, James Rafferty.

"Yellow Jack"—*continued*

New York Herald Tribune

FEBRUARY 28, 1947

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Well Done!

HAVING decided to do one play at a time, the American Repertory Theater has picked one of heart and substance in "Yellow Jack." The Sidney Howard drama, written in collaboration with Paul de Kruif a dozen or more years ago, is admirably suited to the talents of the company. Victor Jory, Philip Bourneuf, Alfred Ryder and their co-players at the International Theater give this latest revival a sustained and sometimes heroic interpretation. If Martin Ritt's staging is somwhat jerky, it is a flaw that may be remedied. What matters is that a fascinating dramatization of man's conquest of disease is finding provocative statement once more.

* * *

Howard wrote, you may remember, of Walter Reed and his medical commission, tracking down the dread mosquito carrier of yellow fever in Cuba at the turn of the century. In a series of swiftly changing scenes, spot-lighted against only a few props, he celebrated the tenacious curiosity of scientists and the sheer courage of men willing to act as guinea pigs for the sake of humanity. There is an inevitable episodic quality to the piece, accentuated by the halting direction on Columbus Circle but it still has a curious suspense and cumulative excitement. As in the original production, the action is accompanied by soldier choruses and bugle calls, but the lines carry the chief burden of the theme.

* * *

They are given due justice by the performers. Bourneuf is particularly fine as the crotchety Scotchman, who set the doctors of the American occupation army on the right track in their hunt for a death-dealing insect. In his portrayal there is an enduring tribute to the ceaseless quest of medical science. Alfred Ryder, as the impatient young Lazear, who believed in a theory and sacrificed his life in proving it, has a far more dramatic role. He plays it splendidly, whether he is taunting his colleague Carroll into letting a plague-laden mosquito bite him, is making an unethical test on a cavalryman, or is moaning of waste on his death-bed, believing the experiments fruitless.

* * *

Jory is emphatic as Carroll, who becomes the first self-willed victim of yellow jack, but he keeps the part persuasive. Raymond Greenleaf is fine as Walter Reed, who had to fight Army red tape as well as the scientific skepticism to clear the Caribbeans of a terrible scourge and. Efram Zimbalist jr. gives a good account of himself as the Cuban doctor Agramonte, who collaborated with a handful of men in a heroic cause. Then there are Arthur Keegan, William Windom, Eli Wallach and John Becher, bringing color and eloquence to the parts of the volunteers who clinched a great medical discovery. There are dull and repetitious interludes in "Yellow Jack," but it is well served at the International to remind one that it is a drama of considerable stature.

The Sun

FEBRUARY 28, 1947

'Yellow Jack' Is Oratorical and Clinical, but It Is Still Effective Theater.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"Yellow Jack" is not as impressive as it seemed thirteen years ago, but it is still an eloquent and interesting drama, and one worth reviving for a limited engagement. The American Repertory Theater, which has turned to the one-play-at-a-time policy, brought it into the International last night.

"Yellow Jack," written by the late Sidney Howard, in collaboration with Paul de Kruif, and dramatizing the heroic and gallant fight made by medical science to determine the cause of yellow fever, is not a compact play—and never was. In the present staging its oratorical effect is heightened, and it frequently has a tendency to become a clinical report.

The fact remains, however, that "Yellow Jack" retains considerable dramatic impact, and in its present production it offers several good performances as it proves the point that the mosquito is the carrier of the yellow fever microbe. Most of the scenes are still holding. I could do with less of the broad and labored humors of the soldiers, the human guinea pigs.

Sidney Howard's play, first presented by Guthrie McClintic in 1934, is now done with the use of a platform, steps, black drapes, props and spot lighting. There are blackouts for scene changes. The atmosphere of the period—Cuba in the fall of 1900, when the yellow fever epidemic was raging—is provided with the off-stage singing of the popular tunes of the day.

Victor Jory, who has done a little of everything upon the International stage, is now a member of the Yellow Fever Commission and he turns in a strong performance as the realistic Dr. Carroll. Raymond Greenleaf is very convincing as the earnest, patient, heroic and dead-weary Walter Reed. Alfred Ryder is a fiery Lazear, who dies a martyr to the cause, and Efrem Zimbalist Jr., playing Dr. Agramonte, is quite a believable man of medicine. Philip Bourneuf gives a good actor's sure, if somewhat stagey, touch to the role of the old local doctor who has had the mosquito-carrier theory for nineteen years. The parts of the soldiers are done fairly well by Arthur Keegan, William Windom, Eli Wallach and John Becher.

"Yellow Jack" has more of a lecture-platform tendency under Martin Ritt's staging than it had under McClintic's, and it is often diffuse and dawdling and scattered, but it holds up well enough for two hours. And, for all its loss of force after thirteen years, it remains an effective piece of theater.

Daily Mirror

FEBRUARY 28, 1947

'Yellow Jack' Opens In Fine Revival

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"Yellow Jack," one of our most stirring whodunits, was revived last evening by the American Repertory Theatre, Inc., at the International Theatre. It is good to report that the Sidney Howard-Paul de Kruif script shows few of the wrinkles that are supposed to come with age.

"Yellow Jack" doesn't deal with how Keeneye Casey trapped murderer Muscles Pete. It isn't a soap opera. Praise, be. It is a story more thrilling than any soap opera. It is the story of how Major Walter Reed and his courageous associates discovered that mosquitos were the villains spreading deadly Yellow Fever.

It tells of valiant scientists guessing wrong time and again as to the identity of the murderous carrier, but struggling endlessly against odds powerful enough to thwart inexhaustible patience, heroic inspiration, compelling respect for science and great love of humanity

It is at once a tribute to the men who risked and gave their lives in the fight against Yellow Fever and a gripping drama. It is the kind of play we should get more often in the theatre and on the radio. It is something to make an American a little more proud of his fellow Americans both North and Latin Americans.

For it was Cuba's Aristides Agramonte and Carlos Finaly, as well as our Reed, Jesse Lazar, James Carroll and William Crawford Gorgas, who helped put an end to one of this continent's most terrifying scourges.

Four of the more attractive characters in "Yellow Jack" are young soldiers who volunteered to serve as guinea pigs for Reed's experiments — O'Hara, McClelland, Busch and Brinkerhof. These roles were acted superlatively in the first production by James Stewart, Myron McCormack, Sam Levine and, if memory play us not false, Millard Mitchell.

They are acted capably in the present instance by Arthur Keegan, William Windom, Eli Wallach and John Becher. We liked particularly Keegan as O'Hara.

Victor Jory, Alfred Ryder, Philip Bourneuf, Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., Emery Battis, Raymond Greenleaf, Eugene Stuckmann and Anne Jackson are good in other roles. Jory, Bourneuf and Ryder have the showier roles of Carroll, Finaly and Lazar and do notably well by them.

"Yellow Jack" should be revived annually as a tribute to the nobility of man and as a reminder that soldiers can be brave in peace as in war. And there should be more plays like it written for the American theatre. We prefer the Walter Reeds of this world to the philanderers and thugs.

New York Post

FEBRUARY 28, 1947

Sidney Howard's 'Yellow Jack' Still Fine, if Declamatory

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

The American Repertory Theatre entered upon a new phase of its career last night with a revival of "Yellow Jack," which the late and deeply lamented Sidney Howard wrote in collaboration with Paul de Kruif. Produced for the first time in 1934, this scientific detective story about the search for the mysterious carrier of the virus of yellow fever is still a striking and absorbing drama, even though its current presentation has a way of making it seem rather declamatory upon occasion.

The best thing about "Yellow Jack" is that, in an effectively dramatic way, it manages to be an austere account of the nature of the scientific spirit, with its heroism, selflessness, dedication and ruthlessness. With few waste motions and little nonsense about it, the Howard play, in almost documentary fashion, presents the history of a notable adventure in modern science, and makes it seem heroic, without losing sight of the fact that the scientists, in the interest of future generations, could face risking not only their own lives but those of unsuspecting laymen.

The drama, you may remember, is a tribute to the young American soldiers in Cuba in 1900, who allowed themselves to be made guinea pigs in the experiment by which Dr. Walter Reed and his associates proved that the mosquito was the carrier of yellow fever, as well as to the medical heroes of that event. Those great men in medical history, Drs. Reed, Agramonte, Carroll, Lazear and Finlay, are contemplated with admiration, but without undue sentimentalizing.

Nevertheless, despite its attempted and generally successful documentary austerity, "Yellow Jack" does have a tendency to be declamatory and in the nature of a patriotic pageant, with Dr. Reed and his associates sometimes apparently talking for the ages, rather than to each other. This tendency, although dangerous, is not excessive, but it should be curbed in the direction and acting, and here the current presentation is not altogether successful.

Although Victor Jory is excellent as the sometimes rebellious Carroll and Philip Bourneuf is theatrically effective as the crotchety Finlay, Raymond Greenleaf is inclined to make Walter Reed too conscious of posterity. Martin Ritt's direction would have been more satisfying if it had guarded against this same defect.

Such is the power of the cinema that "Yellow Jack" is no doubt chiefly remembered as the play in which James Stewart appeared as O'Hara, the most debonair of the guinea pigs. As I recall it, he did not make the mistake of giving O'Hara the brashness that the otherwise effective Arthur Keegan reveals. Robert Rawlings has a good bit as an unsuspecting tool of science. Despite weaknesses in production, "Yellow Jack" remains a distinctive drama.

DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 28, 1947

'Yellow Jack' in a Sturdy Revival By American Repertory Theatre

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Yellow Jack," the medical documentary drama by the late Sidney Howard and Paul de Kruif, the microbe hunter, has been given a fairly interesting revival by the American Repertory Theatre. Interesting enough, indeed, to make it a sturdy piece to be played in a repertoire; but the repertory idea has been temporarily dropped and the play is in for a run of four weeks at the International Theatre.

To refresh the memory of those who saw "Yellow Jack" in 1934 and to instruct those who didn't, I should report that the drama concerns the struggle of military medicos, including some great men, against yellow fever in Cuba in 1900. It was this struggle and the ultimate victory which pinned this plague on the mosquito and enabled Gorgas later to clean up the deadly area of the Panama Canal.

Yellow fever is a singular disease, for only humans get it—and this meant that human guinea pigs had to be used for research. This is the story, and the drama, of the play.

Workmanlike Company.

The ART has assembled a workmanlike cast, not entirely from its own ranks, and has made a workmanlike presentation. In place of the excellent scenery of the original production there is hardly any scenery at all, yet the play and the players convey the illusion of movement from laboratory to hospital, soldiers' tent or barracks grounds. Transitions are achieved by blacking out the stage momentarily, and these blackouts tend to point up the fragmentary character of the playwrights' work.

I was not swept off my feet by "Yellow Jack" in 1934, although I recognized its high purpose and the skill with which the authors dramatized their scenes and strung them together. I admitted I had been instructed and had had moments of excitement or laughter, but I was not convinced I had seen a completely successful piece of theatre.

Still Holds True.

This held true for me again last evening.

My new instructors were quite good—Raymond Greenleaf as the high-minded Walter Reed, Philip Bourneuf as the old Scotch doctor who had fought 19 years to persuade medical science of the deadliness of the mosquito; Alfred Ryder as Dr. Lazear, the one martyr among the human guinea pigs, and young Efrem Zimbalist Jr. in a gray wig and goatee as the Cuban Dr. Agramonte.

The humor department was nicely handled by Arthur Keegan, William Windom, Eli Wallach and John Becher as the four soldiers who volunteered their lives to test the mosquito theory. All in all, the American Repertory Theatre has done a reasonably interesting job with a reasonably interesting stage documentary.

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 28, 1947

'Yellow Jack' a Superb Revival

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Yellow Jack," which the American Repertory Theater will run in an uninterrupted series of performances, is the group's finest production.

The stark heroic drama is played with fullest values of its grandeur, its deep emotion and its comedy. This saga of the doctors who traced yellow fever to the mosquito may sound clinical in description, but on the stage it tugs at the heart and is a timeless tribute to the majesty of man.

Revives Faith in Humanity.

Walter Reed is the most familiar name of those connected with the brave experiments. He figures as a sort of ringmaster or a captain of a daring expedition. The others are courageous, fine men.

The play follows the adventure of the doctors, fanatical scientists with impersonal perspective. In counterpoint to this theme runs the story of the ordinary soldier, bored with the occupation of Cuba and anxious to return to his normal life. They are the men who will be saved, but they, too, are heroic enough to engage in the experiments.

This story of men giving their lives for science and humanity is exalting in the pride it makes one feel for the human race. It is deeply reassuring after the last few years.

Victor Jory and Philip Bourneuf are starred in this production, and appropriately, but the cast is expert to a man. Jory gives his

strongest performance for ART so far as the Dr. Carroll who, unconvinced of the experiment's chances, yet allows himself to be infected. He is sardonic and convincing.

Mr. Bourneuf is first rate as the older doctor who has tracked down the mosquito years before, but never convinced anyone. He is cynical about the younger men who would cash in on his work, but the true, eager scientist when he finds they will do what he has never been able to do—experiment on human beings.

Acting Outstanding.

Raymond Greenleaf is cool and strong as Reed and Alfred Ryder is brilliant as the hot-headed Lazear whose faith never wavers, and whose life is the price of the experiment.

Of the soldiers Arthur Keegan is outstanding as the Irishman who dreams of studying medicine, and John Becher is warm as the simple Brinkerhof who volunteers but is cured.

The play is tight and absorbing. The actual medical work, such as popping a test tube against a man's bared arm so a mosquito will bite him, becomes thrilling.

Two high emotional points are those in which Jory and Ryder actually succumb to yellow jack.

Moving Comedy.

The comedy in the play is an innate part of its whole problem. The prospect of these men hoping with all their strength that they will catch the disease is a reverse on casual human nature that is comical but always moving at the same time.

The production is done with utmost simplicity. There is the raised laboratory like a high throne in the center of the stage. Scenes elsewhere are played on various levels with a minimum of setting. Spotlights direct the attention and the show moves with alacrity.

Martin Ritt, the director, has done an expert job of giving the play all the value of its intent.

PM

MARCH 2, 1947

Kronenberger

The Hard, Heroic Fight Of Men Against Disease

Yellow Jack, which the American Repertory Theater has revived for a four-week run, is well worth reviving. Sidney Howard's account of the valiant search for the cause of yellow fever can only with a certain license be termed a play, but it tells a famous and fascinating story in effective stage terms. What one most wished for on Thursday night was a more effective production. The constant desire, it seemed to me, to point things up had rather a way of pulling things down.

There was a suggestion of heroics and a strong touch of oratory about the proceedings that made for theatricalism without making for better theater; there was merely a loss in naturalness. There are occasions when plain facts can be more telling than anything fabricated to bolster them; when an idea or an ideal constitutes something so passionate in itself that it seems grander naked than clothed. This is largely true of *Yellow Jack*; and wherever the script or the production adds stucco, it loses strength.

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This is not, of course, to play down the human element in such a story; the human element counts enormously. For the doctors who, under Walter Reed's leadership and following Carlos Findlav's theory, set out to prove that yellow fever is carried by mosquitoes, were very human men. One of them was hotheaded, another was bullheaded; they had egos as well as selflessness; they could be ruthless as well as highminded; they had to be sleuths as well as scientists. And they not only had to lick a baffling scientific problem; they had to fight interference and opposition and skepticism. This production very properly shows how heroic they were, but it tends too much to spotlight them as heroes—and as orators.

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The four young men who volunteer to be guinea pigs are heroes too, but the play for no great reason tries to make characters of them as well, and they become boring. *Yellow Jack* is at its best when it is driving ahead on its great mission; is, indeed, most dramatic when it is most documentary. Just so Raymond Greenleaf, who plays Walter Reed with the least attempt at effect, comes off the most effectively. As the fiery Dr. Lazear, who dies of the disease he is experimenting on, Alfred Ryder is uneven but intense; as the old Cuban, Carlos Findlay, Philip Bourneuf has good moments, but makes the part seem a stage-part; and Victor Jory's Dr. Carroll, though it has force enough at times, seems actorish too.

—Louis Kronenberger.

Journal and American

FEBRUARY 28, 1947

'Yellow Jack' Revived At Repertory Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

There must be some good hidden reason why the more persistent survivors of the American Repertory Theatre revived "Yellow Jack" as the first of its post-mortem undertakings. Then, in case you care, this Sidney Howard-out of Paul de Kruif resuscitation will be followed by a reproduction of Eva Le Gallienne's Greenwich Village "Alice."

In their playhouse on Columbus Circle, Victor Jory and Philip Bourneuf seem to be carrying out the misguided production policy which was largely responsible for their organization's disintegration. By which I mean the policy of reviving plays in which the actors want to act, rather than plays the public wants to see.

They, without Cherry Crawford, Eva Le Gallienne, Margaret Webster, Ernest Truex, Walter Hampden and a couple of lesser lights, whose names elude me, continue to insist that the p'ayer is the thing. "Henry VIII," "What Every Woman Knows," "John Gabriel Borkman" and "Androcles and the Lion" were merely vehicles in which those players rode.

And so was "Yellow Jack" last evening. The mosquito-bitten Private Carroll provided a big spotlighted role for Mr. Jory's handling, while the frustrated Dr. Finlay provided a big spotlighted role for Mr. Bourneuf's talent.

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Direction Called Weak

When, in 1934, Guthrie McClintic gave "Yellow Jack" its initial showing at the Martin Beck, James Carroll was attended to by Barton MacLane and Carlos Finlay was assigned to the Whitford Kane who relinquished one gravedigger for another. These, for 79 performances, had James Stewart, Samuel Levene and Myron McCormick for helpers.

They also had the strong yet sensitive direction of Mr. McClintic. And "Yellow Jack" was up his directorial alley, which is not the alley of the director at the International. Whoever the programed Martin Ritt may or may not be, he might as well have stood in bed where last night's cooking-over is concerned.

For the most part it is because of him that the dramatization of "The Microbe Hunters" remains flat and flavorless. While the piece's Mr. Carroll and Dr. Finlay are having a high asterial holiday, the human guinea pigs in uniform are no more than paperdolls cut by Playwright Howard from Historian de Kruif's pages.

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Not Frightened Yet'

Last night, at the International, the final stanza of the two act documentary was played for laughs. And laughs are what it got, even when they were neither called-for nor intended.

Victor Jory, with the courage of his critic-baiting convictions, has not yet frightened me into listing him among my favorite players. All this season, in the American Repertory Company, his Henry VIII, John Gabriel Borkman and Perrovius have left me where they found me. And now his James Carroll fails to make me budge!

Phillip Bourneuf, on the other hand, is of such stuff as real repertory actors are made. His Chronicler in "Henry VIII," his David Wylie in "What Every Woman Knows" and his Caesar in "Androcles and the Lion" brought forth such pleasure as the American Repertory Theatre managed to provide. Once, in "Arsenic and Old Lace," he was my favorite drama critic.

In lesser roles, Robert Rawlings (not Herbert Rawlings, as listed in the program) is a newcomer on whom to keep an appreciative eye. His William H. Dean of the United States Army is as three dimensional as the others are not. Anne Jackson, as the play's lone female, seems to have been frightened by Miss Le Gallienne...

This vehicular revival, this "Yellow Jack," won't get the survivors of the American Repertory Theatre anywhere. Before it is too late they have got to learn that the play, not the player, is the thing to catch the patronage of their public.

"Hamlet"

Space permits us to reproduce only four newspaper reviews of each of the five presentations of the Donald Wolfit Repertory Company. Their limited engagement is scheduled to end March 8, 1947.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

FEBRUARY 27, 1947

By HOWARD BARNES

Not To Be!

THE magnificence of "Hamlet" glows steadily through a pedestrian production in Donald Wolfit's final repertory offering at the Century. Despite the actor-manager's sing-song delivery and a woeful lack of imaginative direction, the Shakespeare tragedy maintains a certain grandeur. Since the ill-assorted group of English players can be heard and understood and several of them can really act, the revival has a degree of eloquence and excitement. It must inevitably be compared to earlier presentations though notably that of Maurice Evans, and it suffers sadly in the process.

For even as a stock-company reading, the current performance of what is perhaps the greatest of all plays leaves much to be desired. Wolfit has had the good sense to make the melancholy Dane a vigorous and subtle figure rather than a languishing figure of self-torment and despair. His actions are forthright and dramatically significant at times, but there is no inner fire in his portrayal and his elocutionary enthusiasm becomes soporific. Those who have never seen the drama may take pleasure in appreciating the soaring genius which makes it play even with indifferent interpreters. Others had better skip a shabby handling of rich and abundant dramatic material.

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Rosalind Iden, who was so good in "The Merchant of Venice," realizes fragments of beauty and power in the revival. Her Ophelia may not be the best that has been seen on local boards in recent years, but it is sprung with passion and conviction. Her mad scene is one of the more rewarding interludes at the Century. Alexander Gauge gives a sinister dignity to the part of the evil and fearful king, who knows that Hamlet suspects that he murdered his father. Meanwhile John Wynyard is excellent as Horatio.

* * *

There are few cuts in the present version, although the gravedigger's scene might well have been omitted as it is currently done. The play within a play, in which Hamlet accuses his mother and step-father, comes off rather well and the ghostly visitations are not too hard to take. What is chiefly wanting in "Hamlet," obviously, is a great actor in the title role. Hamlet's admonitions to the itinerant players are not only ironic in Wolfit's delivery of the lines. In them is contained the chief criticism of the visiting company. The greater a Shakespeare drama, the more consummate must be its execution. This "Hamlet" is little more than third-rate.

"HAMLET."

Play by William Shakespeare; setting designed by Donald Wolfit and Eric Adeney; music arranged by Rosabel Watson; presented by Hall Shelton, by arrangement with Advance Players Association, Ltd., at the Century Theater, Wednesday evening, February 26, 1947.

The cast:

Hamlet	Donald Wolfit
Claudius	Alexander Gauge
Horatio	John Wynyard
Ghost	Eric Adeney
Polonius	Eric Maxon
Rosencrantz	Robert Algar
Guildenstern	David Dodimead
Osric	Richard Blythe
Marcellus	George Bradford
Bernardo	David Dodimead
Francisco	Richard Blythe
Laertes	Kempster Barnes
Sailor	Hugh Cross
First Player	Josef Shear
Second Player	Frederick Horrey
Player Queen	Marion Marshall
First Gravedigger	Malcolm Watson
Second Gravedigger	Geoffrey Wilkinson
Priest	Robert Algar
Reynaldo	Geoffrey Wilkinson
Fortinbras	Frederick Horrey
Gertrude	Violet Farebrother
Ophelia	Rosalind Iden

SYNOPSIS: The scene is in Elsinore and the play is presented in two acts.

The Sun

FEBRUARY 27, 1947

Wolfit's Determined Players Try 'Hamlet'; They Should Stick to 'Volpone.'

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Donald Wolfit saved up "Hamlet" for his final New York gesture, for the last of his five productions, putting it on last night within the walls of the mildly protesting Century. On the physical side the presentation is a dreary one; in performance, these visiting players are at their very worst.

It's quite understandable, of course, that Wolfit and his determined followers would want to turn up eventually in the gory old castle at Elsinore, but it's also regrettable. They were good in the rowdy caperings of "Volpone," and perhaps they should have stuck to it.

Wolfit was an interesting Lear, a fair Touchstone, a satisfactory Shylock and a really excellent Volpone, but he gives a strange performance of Hamlet. Certainly a tedious one. He hasn't the magnetism for the role. In moments he is over-deliberate and in others he is too hurried, getting wildly out of control. He is interesting in a few scenes, but too often he is just hammy.

John Wynyard, who came to life in "Volpone," does well enough as Horatio. Rosalind Iden is quite acceptable as the docile, daffy and much-maligned Ophelia. But Alexander Gauge, who has been winning cheers pretty steadily during this engagement, loses the touch at Elsinore, being little more than obviously villainous as the red-wigged, conscience-stricken King Claudius. Eric Adeney's Ghost is well spoken. Robert Algar and David Dodimead don't do much for those peculiar fellows, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Eric Maxon's portrayal of the prying and cackling old Polonius is fair. Violet Farebrother just isn't the actress for the part of the guilty Queen.

The new "Hamlet" at the Century, then, is one lacking in performance, pace, style, force and general excitement. Donald Wolfit probably could not resist including this enthralling and magnificent tragedy in his repertoire, but it exposes the weaknesses of his players to a greater extent than the other four plays have done. They're just not up to it.

Bring on "Volpone."

Daily Mirror

FEBRUARY 27, 1947

Wolfit's 'Hamlet' Is Recommended

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Donald Wolfit's London Repertory Company last night gave one of the clearest readings of Shakespeare's "Hamlet" we have yet heard at the Century Theatre. We were able to understand passages that have eluded us in more distinguished and better ballyhooed productions.

Wolfit's performance in the title role was remarkably good when it is considered that he has appeared previously in four other plays since beginning his New York engagement two weeks ago. He brought modulation, admirable diction, commendable restraint on the whole, and import to the famous part.

We recommend his interpretation particularly to students. He emphasized carefully the salient portions of both his role and the dramatic action of the play. Points that have not gotten across in more eloquent and handsomely mounted productions did last night.

His production is aimed at the gallery gods as well as critics in the first rows, and is more effective when witnessed from the balcony or rear orchestra seats than from the more costly chairs. The ensembles, the sets and costumes also improve with distance. We know whereof we speak, having covered both "Hamlet," "As You Like It" and "The Merchant of Venice" from front and back of the huge Century.

Wolfit is not the conventional melancholy Dane. He seems shorter and better padded than most Hamlets. He is shrewd and human. For all the flaws in his characterization, he moved us more than did Maurice Evans. Only one Hamlet has seemed more reasonable and understandable in my time. That was John Barrymore's.

Rosalind Iden, Alexander Gauge, Eric Maxon, Marion Marshall, John Wynyard, Kempster Barnes and Eric Adeney gave Wolfit the kind of support one should expect from players who have acted five productions through Canada to New York.

We recommend Wolfit's "Hamlet" to all those willing to understand the handicaps under which a touring repertory company operates.

DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 27, 1947

Donald Wolfit Plays Hamlet and Hamlet Remains the Better Man

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In a recent magazine piece involving a courtroom expert, Alva Johnston observed that experts seldom agree. He observed that, after more than three centuries, it has not yet been decided whether Hamlet was mad or just nervous. Last evening he was just nervous.

For his fifth offering in repertory at the Century Theatre Britain's Donald Wolfit offered "Hamlet." The production was not without merit here and there, for this greatest and most rugged of tragedies can take quite a beating without ever being completely licked. But "these sighs, these profound heaves" were not alone Queen Gertrude's.

Mr. Wolfit had a workout. Whenever he thought it was time for Hamlet to go a bit daft he talked fast and hard, like Lulu McConnell; and whenever he was taking it easy he fell into a singsong whose monotony was unnerving to this listener. Clearly, "Volpone" is the best of our visitors' offerings.

A Good Polonius.

On the merit side was an engaging Polonius by Eric Maxon—a man amusing enough, this Polonius, and not quite the old fool which some other productions have made him. And I rather liked Rosalind Iden's Ophelia, for she did her mad scene with comparative restraint. Another creditable item was a real ghost. Instead of lurking dimly against the backdrop, this fellow came right down to the apron where everybody could see him.

The physical production was simple—so simple, in fact, that scenes were so often run together that I had the impression the play was being done at the information booth at Grand Central. And that Mr. Wolfit wanted to catch a train.

"Volpone"

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Journal and American

FEBRUARY 25, 1947

'Volpone' Presented At Century Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

The news gets better and better as Donald Wolfit and his London Company go on and on. Last night, they changed from William Shakespeare to his friend, Ben Jonson. The result was fun. Mr. Wolfit and his troupers romped through "Volpone" like the stage-struck amateurs they are, keeping their spirits high and their humor low. So, unless you were a visiting Bostonian, you had a high-low time.

Surprising as it is, Donald Wolfit and his companions made theatrical history last night at the Century. By adding Ben Jonson's classic to their Elizabethan repertoire, they achieved the signal honor of presenting "Volpone" for the first time on a Broadway stage. It took the comedy almost three and a half centuries to get from London to New York. It was worth waiting for!

No, I am not forgetting the "Volpone" The Theatre Guild produced at its own theatre nearly two decades ago. But that was no more than a "sardonic farce" based on Ben Jonson's classic comedy and translated into English from the Teutonic text of Stefan Zweig. Even with Dudley Digges, Alfred Lunt, Helen Westley, Margalo Gillmore and the Guilded likes of them, it was neither Jonsonian nor joyful.

At the Century, in the company of Donald Wolfit and his Londoners, it is both of these.

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Cash in on Assets

As schoolboy turned bricklayer, bricklayer turned soldier, soldier turned playwright, playwright turned poet, Ben Jonson was a bad bohemian about his beloved London. If, as John Gassner is fond of pointing out to his students of the drama, he was often inebriated with alcohol, he was also continuously intoxicated with life. This intoxication with life is "Volpone's" greatest asset.

It is an asset the acting Londoners recognize and make the most of in the fourth of their five Elizabethan revivals. They really do romp through the original five acts and four times that many scenes of Ben Jonson's fierce and funny play. They use all his four letter words. And all his five letter words as well. At last night's Broadway premiere, "Volpone," the comedy, came off wholeheartedly.

Although "Volpone" is Ben Jonson's most timeless play, "Sejanus" is his most timely. I wish some adventurous producer would bring it to life some day, with its degenerate rulers, upstart dictators, agents provocateur, book burnings and persecutions of the liberal-minded. But this is wishful writing, and I, along with yesterday's first-nighters, should be thankful for what is here.

What is here is an alive and kicking reproduction of an alive and kicking comedy, replete with loud and lusty humor.

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Play's the Thing

In "Volpone," Mr. Wolfit and his players help one another. Apart from Kempster Barnes, who continues to intone even his simplest of speeches, the ragged individualism which has marred the collective playing of our ambitious visitors is, for the most part, absent. Last night's performance was all for one, and the one was Ben Jonson's comedy. For two hours and a half, the play remained the thing.

Donald Wolfit's Venetian magnifico was rough and rowdy. With tongue in cheek, his feet were firmly planted on the playwright's ground. Just as Mr. Wolfit's Touchstone was an improvement on his Lear, Mr. Wolfit's Volpone was more effective than his Shylock. And Mr. Wolfit's Shylock was excellent. But, when you think of it, the oppressor is bound to be more showy than the oppressed.

Rosalind Iden comes again into her own as Celia, Corvino's beautiful beleaguered wife. John Wynyard is what Ben Jonson ordered as Volpone's parasite. The others are generally as they should be, especially the Bobby-Clarkian magistrates of Joseph Shear, George Bradford and Malcolm Watson. The "permanent setting" devised by Mr. Wolfit serves throughout and his one dress suit is a thing to hold the eye...

"Volpone" will be repeated tonight. I urge you adults not to miss it. There's nothing franker, faster or funnier in town.

'VOLPONE.'

Comedy by Ben Jonson; setting by Donald Wolfit; music arranged by Rosabel Watson; presented by Hall Shelton, by arrangement with Advance Players Association, Ltd., at the Century Theater Monday evening, February 24, 1947. The cast:

Volpone ..... Donald Wolfit
Mosca, his parasite ..... John Wynyard
Voltore, an advocate ..... Frederick Horrey
Corbaccio an old gentleman ..... Eric Maxon
Corvino, a merchant ..... Alexander Gauge
Bonario, son to Corbaccio, Kempster Barnes
Sir Politick Would-Be, a knight ..... Robert Algar
Peregrine ..... Malcolm Watson
Nano, a dwarf ..... Richard Blythe
Cs Sirone, a eunuch, Geoffrey Wilkinson
Androgyno ..... David Dodimead
Three Magistrates ..... Josef Shear, George Bradford, Malcolm Watson
Celia, wife to Corvino ..... Rosalind Iden
Servants, officers of Justice, &c.

SCENE—Venice. Volpone's house, a street, Corvino's house and the Senate House.

New York Post

FEBRUARY 25, 1947

Wolfit Players at Their Best In Ben Jonson's Scornful Play

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Now that Donald Wolfit's company and the local drama critics are on better terms, the players from London, who seem to be growing on us, have turned from Shakespeare to his fellow Elizabethan, Ben Jonson, and last night they offered a richly entertaining production of his sardonic and contemptuous comedy about avarice, "Volpone." It is the liveliest and most imaginative acting that the valiant visitors have yet revealed, and they had quite a triumph in a play that has freshness for a New York audience.

Indeed, metropolitan historians tells us that this is the first time "Volpone" has actually been done here. It is true that a version, and a delightful one, was presented by the Theatre Guild in 1928, with Dudley Digges and Alfred Lunt in the leading roles, but it was in such an extremely free adaptation by Stefan Zweig that it was virtually a new comedy. As I recall it, the Zweig version was far more amiably disposed toward mankind, too.

Jonson's Scorn

For, as Ben Jonson wrote it, "Volpone" is certainly one of the most savage and scornful of plays. Its contempt for the human race and its general distaste for human conduct and motive are complete and terrible, but the hatred comes out, not in bitter denunciation but in rich, full blooded, relishful laughter at the idiotic scheming of villainy and the foolish gullibility of villains.

Mankind, old Ben wants us to remember, is repulsive enough in most of its activities, but even it achieves a new nadir in both monstrosity and fatuousness when it goes in for avarice. So, as Volpone sets out to fleece the charming gentlemen who expect to be his heirs and they set out to undo him, their villainy becomes so entangled that all of them are destroyed, which is the only chance justice has.

Bawdy and Gay

It is a lugubrious story of evil triumphant that "Volpone" has to tell, but there is assuredly nothing lugubrious about the way it is told. For all its sneering hatred, it is such an inventive, bawdy, hilarious and perversely gay comedy that, instead of being distressing, it is vastly entertaining, although certainly in a cynical fashion. It should be remembered that in the end it isn't virtue that triumphs, but evil that outsmarts itself. And the audience chiefly enjoys the evil.

In previous performances of the visiting troupe, even the most friendly critics have been able to point out only a few good portrayals as opposed to many dubious ones. In "Volpone," however, everybody is in fine form, and the production moves with sureness and skill. Mr. Wolfit is an excellent Volpone, Frederick Horrey, Eric Maxon and the reliable Alexander Gauge are admirable as assorted s c o u n d r e l s, and Kempster Barnes and the winning Rosalind Iden are pleasant as the lonely representatives of virtue. But John Wynyard, whose earlier performances have caused me small delight, is best of all, with a stunning characterization of the parasitic Mosca. It is all good, bawdy fun.

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 25, 1947

Some Rare Ben Jonson

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Eschewing Will Shakespeare for the moment, Mr. Wolfit and his associates added Ben Jonson to their repertory at the Century last evening. They staged "Volpone," which is Jonson's pioneering version of the little foxes. For the most part it is a witty satire on man's natural rapacity—contemporaneous with Shakespeare, but harder and more sententious in literary style. Some years ago the Theatre Guild staged it in Zweig's adaptation with a cast that seemed brilliant at the time and seems dazzling in retrospect.

Although Mr. Wolfit's repertory production is naturally less distinguished, it is generally satisfactory as a rendering of an Elizabethan classic; and when Jonson is most outrageously sardonic it is very amusing indeed. Mr. Wolfit, as the unprincipled rascal of Venice, takes heartless relish in Volpone's deceits and strategems, meanwhile entrancing the audience with a noble pair of legs elegantly clad in yellow tights and tossed ravishingly across an amorous divan. If Mr. Wolfit does not waste time in subtleties, he knows how to keep a narrative briskly in motion and how to pluck a character lucidly out of an old playbook.

* * *

Two of his associates are in especially high fettle in Jonson's mordant lampoon. As Corvino, the hypocrite and schemer, Alexander Gauge is vastly entertaining with his counterfeit of virtue, his obese solemnity and stupidity. And as Mosca, Volpone's servant, John Wynyard's false unction and knavery are amusingly expressed and animate the entire performance. Rosalind Iden gives a spirited performance in the ungrateful part of Corvino's wife, probably doing as well by this confused and helpless lady as Jonson did.

To see an entire sequence of Elizabethan plays in a hurry is to realize that the stage fools and mountebanks of Shakespeare's time are not precisely our idea of comedy. Volpone's sportive grotesques with falsetto voices, witches' hands and witless capering are no improvement over Shakespeare.

For great as they were, neither Master Will nor Rare Ben ever had the privilege of watching Bobby Clark belabor a play script with his whirling slapstick. That shows how much life has improved in as short a time as three centuries.

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 25, 1947

Wolfit's 'Volpone' Hits Uneven Note

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The Ben Jonson comedy "Volpone" last night was the fourth play of the Donald Wolfit company's local season. Performed in an uneven mood, it sometimes seemed that the play provoked more laughter on the stage than it did in the audience.

Filled with unlikely deceptions, the work has an artificiality about it that demands more consistent sparkle than it receives at the hands of the visiting players.

The play tells how a voluptuary works on the greed of his friends to win their riches from them by promising they shall soon be his heirs. The scheming Volpone ties them up in knots, even bringing a jealous merchant to the point of forcing his wife into Volpone's bed in hopes of inheriting great wealth.

Get Just Desserts.

The connivances eventually trip up their perpetrator, when his servant and ally tries to outdo him, and most of the characters are sent to terrible but deserved fates.

Donald Wolfit makes a vivid figure of Volpone, but he is inclined to play the central role for flamboyant effect to the distress of any light spirit of the play.

Only the scene where he disguises himself as a medicine man has the antic light-heartedness that can project the satirical intent of the comedy.

Laughs Like the Shadow.

Groveling in his jewels, or seducing Celia, pictorial as the latter scene is, the star is more malignant than rascally. And he has a habit of laughing like The Shadow.

Alexander Gauge provides some of the most genuinely comic moments of the show. He plays the merchant who turns in a moment from threatening his wife with death for appearing at a window, to driving her into becoming Volpone's mistress at the promise of money.

His bland rationalization and his stupid avarice make a rounded character. He also gets some of the most uninhibited laughs of the performance with his bawdy accusations in the trial.

A Sprightly Step.

John Wynyard makes a clearly voiced and good humored rascal of Mosca, Volpone's servant. Through all his eager assistance to the master's schemes, he suggests that he will turn things to his selfish advantage at the slightest opportunity, and does.

He has the lightness and clarity for the play. It is distracting that he should so often walk as if he had sponges for heels.

Rosalind Iden is pictorial as ever, though inclined to rush her lines obscurely as the understandibly frantic Celia.

Frederick Horrey does the best job he has done in the season so far as the vulture of an advocate.

Although the first act of this production runs an hour and a half, there are more defined breaks in the staging which make it move faster than the other plays.

"The Merchant of Venice"

Space permits us to reproduce only four newspaper reviews of each of the five presentations of the Donald Wolfit Repertory Company. Their limited engagement is scheduled to end March 8, 1947.

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 24, 1947

Wolfit Is Convincing as Shylock

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The most striking thing about the Advance Players' "Merchant of Venice," is Donald Wolfit's Shylock, which is as it should be.

The actor brings more imagination and strength to this role than he has to the previous ones performed here, and the figure of the money lender is uncompromising and starkly wicked.

The suggestion of Hebraic accent in Wolfit's speech is most effective. He strides about the stage with his head thrust forward snarling like a cornered animal.

It is quite clear in his portrait of the Jew that it is the contempt of the Christians which drives him to wickedness. His self pity is wretched to watch but never becomes grotesque.

A Human Portia.

His bitter pride is revealed most effectively in the moment at the end of the trial when he spits on Antonio.

The whole court scene is done with excitement and suspense. Rosalind Iden reads the "Quality of Mercy" speech as an angry retort to Shylock rather than in the sententious style in which it is frequently heard. Her Portia is played with more spirit than dignity and as a result she is quite human.

Boring Postlude.

John Wynyard is an eloquent Bassanio and Alexander Gauge plays straightforwardly as Antonio. Zillah Tomlin made a gentle Jessica and Marion Marshal reads Nerissa in a rich voice.

There are times when the play seems interminable. This is partly because some of the scenes sound like obvious padding, and partly because of the manner in which some of them are played.

The device of the suitors' selecting the caskets to win Portia's hand is too familiar to need such solemn treatment. They seem endless except for the fact that they give Miss Iden a chance to be charmingly apprehensive of her fate.

The final scene with all its talk about the rings and identities, is a boring postlude after the trial. It consists of the characters explaining elaborately to each other things that the audience has known all along, and could be tightened up a lot.

The production is pleasant and simple, but was slightly marred Saturday by constant change of lights during the playing of scenes.

'THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.'

Play by William Shakespeare; staged by Donald Wolfit and Christopher Edwards; costumes by Sheila Jackson; music arranged by Rosabel Watson; played by Donald Wolfit and his London company, and presented by Hall Shelton by arrangement with Advance Players Association, Ltd., at the Century Theater Tuesday afternoon, February 22, 1947.

The cast:

Duke of Venice ..... Eric Adeney
Prince of Morocco ..... Robert Algar
Prince of Aragon ..... David Dodimead
Antonio, a merchant of Venice, Alexander Gauge
Bassanio, his friend ..... John Wynyard
Solanio ..... Frederick Horrey
Salarino ..... Richard Blythe
Gratiano ..... Josef Shear
Lorenzo ..... Kempster Barnes
Shylock, a rich Jew ..... Donald Wolfit
Tubal, a Jew, his friend ..... Eric Mason
Launcelot, Gobbo, a clown, Geoffrey Wilkinson
Old Gobbo ..... Malcolm Watson
Balthasar ..... George Bradford
Stephano ..... Margaret Stallard
Clerk to the Court ..... David Dodimead
Portia, a rich heiress ..... Rosalind Iden
Nerissa, her waiting maid, Marion Marshall
Jessica, daughter of Shylock, Zarilla Tomlin
Magnificoes of Venice, officers of the court of justice, gaolers, servants and other attendants.

SCENES: Venice and Portia's house at Belmont.

PM

FEBRUARY 24, 1947

Kronenberger

Mr. Wolfit's Shylock Falls Extremely Short

PM Reviews

Mr. Wolfit's production of *The Merchant of Venice* is both a hammy and a not too happily conceived one. It is not too happily conceived, in a large degree, because it is so hammy—because Mr. Wolfit is playing Shylock for the groundlings, to get as much pure stage effect and surface sharpness out of the character as he can. He seems to me, without distorting the role, to point up what is surefire rather than try to probe what is significant; and this sort of performance reminds us that so long as there is a Jewish problem, Shylock must be for many people not just a key figure in a play but a controversial subject in the theater.

The irony about Shylock is that had Shakespeare kept him what he almost certainly meant him for at the outset—a comedy villain who is hoist by his own petard—the world would probably have lost interest in his hateful side long ago. But under the hand of genius Shylock swelled into some one deeply and terribly human as well; into some one tragic. And the pity about Shylock, artistically, is that Shakespeare created him too soon, did not portray him at a later period and in a very different plot. For Shylock is too big for *The Merchant of Venice*—that mere sewing together of a couple of unreal borrowed plots—and yet not big enough for Shakespeare. Another half dozen years and Shakespeare would have seen him as a tragic—or at least an intensely dramatic—figure from the outset, and would have found a story of quite different *données* and much larger dimensions.

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The dimensions of this story play all too easily into a facile actor's hands, and Mr. Wolfit—quite apart from his interpretation of the role—seems much too intent upon the sheer theater value of his scenes to go at all deeply into Shylock. He plays Shylock, as it happens, as more heartless than drained of heart, more bloodthirsty than bitter—a man, for example, who during the trial scene coldly whets his knife against his shoe.

But beyond that, he plays Shylock from the outside, and with every determination not to miss a trick. There is, perhaps, one sure test of how serious and sensitive an actor's portrayal of Shylock is—his manner of exiting from the courtroom (and simultaneously from the play.) Shakespeare, with Shylock's final speech:

I pray you, give me leave to go from hence:
I am not well. . . .

makes him an effecting figure, one who with the life crushed out of him must put up with one insult more, then crawl away. Mr. Wolfit (he is of course not the first to invent a big exit, but he is surely in his inventiveness among the worst) first spits at Antonio, then draws himself up to an enormous height and strides like some deposed monarch from the room. This is road-company theatrics with a vengeance.

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The rest of the production is very much in the touring style also, with lines for the most part spouted, and with the casket and comedy scenes taken as broadly as is possible. Miss Iden, as Portia, gives a sort of reading of the part, and when she comes to "The quality of mercy"—in fact, to the whole courtroom scene—a misreading. Alexander Gauge is a well-spoken Antonio, but John Wynyard is a weak Bassanio, and Geoffrey Wilkinson an unfortunate Launcelot Gobbo (though I suppose it's hard to wrest a kind adjective from the role). Frankly, the time is past for such Shakespeare as this.

—Louis Kronenberger

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

FEBRUARY 24, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

A Competent Revival

DONALD WOLFIT'S visiting repertory company has found its happiest offering to date in "The Merchant of Venice." The latest Shakespearian revival at the Century Theater is scarcely an inspired production, but it is competent and colorful. Where the English players were stopped in their tracks by the soaring tragedy of "King Lear" and bested by a bad play in "As You Like It," they are here at ease. Rosalind Iden's Portia is particularly warm and articulate. Wolfit himself curbs his declamatory zeal somewhat to make Shylock an arresting wretch and John Wynyard is excellent as Bassanio.

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The chief virtue of the offering is the fact that it shuttles back and forth with considerable fluency between the theme of the caskets, which determine Portia's troth, and the savage account of the Jewish usurer, intent upon his forfeit of a pound of flesh. With the aid of simple but effective scene changes, "The Merchant of Venice" welds fairy tale and melodrama solidly at the Century. Miss Iden deserves most credit for this manipulation, but her collaborators follow her lead admirably. The trial openings of the caskets by the Princes of Morocco and Aragon are not nearly as hard to take as they have been in other revivals of the play. The climax becomes a genuine climax to the preceding action.

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Wolfit's gentile-hating moneylender does not mute any of the implications of the part. In makeup which would serve for a Hollywood horror film, he defies his detractors, grieves for the daughter who has abandoned him and his religion and is merciless in his demand for Antonio's heart as forfeit of a loan. His is a violent characterization of Shylock, full of vengeful indignation and a certain dignity. Unfortunately it is never touched by the sympathy without which the Jew of Venice must remain a baleful villain. As in "King Lear," he attempts to use Shakespeare for effect, when the effect is implicit in the drama itself.

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As already noted Miss Iden is most successful in making the latest exhibit of the troupe rewarding. Her Portia is as comely as it is serene. With no little skill she modulates her portrayal from that of a young girl to a mature woman. Her acting in the judgment scene is at once unaffected and eloquent. Wynyard gives her valuabel support as the successful suitor who places Antonio's life in jeopardy through his wooing and Alexander Gauge is straightforward as the merchant of the title. If Geoffrey Wilkinson has a bad time with the clown, Gobbo, blame that on the bard. This is not a good company at the Century, but it does moderately well with "The Merchant of Venice."

DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 24, 1947

Wolfit Company Finds Its Stride In Smooth 'Merchant of Venice'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Donald Wolfit's company of hardy Britons seems to be improving as it goes along, to the point where "The Merchant of Venice" is easily the best of the three Shakespere plays it has so far offered.

"The Merchant," as presented Saturday afternoon at the Century Theatre, is a smooth-running and entertaining work in which Mr. Wolfit makes a successful Shylock and a number of players are quite happy in their assignments. Moreover, this was the first performance of theirs I have attended at which I could understand everybody most of the time—so I must be getting used to them or they must be getting used to me.

The production is, of course, simple, but not bad-looking—although the Century's electricians, presumably New York natives, still do not manage anything constructive in the way of lighting.

Rosalind Iden, more at her ease than heretofore, is Portia, and at Saturday's matinee Zillah Tomlin, replacing the ailing Penelope Chandler, was Jessica. Robert Algar has a good scene as Portia's Moroccan suitor and the youngsters in the first audience liked David Dodimead's broad playing of the French suitor.

Alexander Gauge, a dependable fellow in a company of somewhat erratic talents, is Antonio, Geoffrey Wilkinson is Launcelot Gobbo, John Wynard plays Bassanio and Kempster Barnes does Lorenzo. I wish Mr. Barnes would get his hair cut while he is over here.

"As You Like It"

Space permits us to reproduce only four newspaper reviews of each of the five presentations of the Donald Wolfit Repertory Company. Their limited engagement is scheduled to end March 8, 1947.

Daily Mirror

FEBRUARY 21, 1947

London Players In 'As You Like It'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

After a stentorian start with "King Lear," Donald Wolfit's London Repertory Company settled down yesterday to some fairly restrained, modulated acting and gave us a sprightly "As You Like It."

"As You Like It," we rediscovered, is packed with some of Shakespeare's more eloquent verse and best-known quotations. It is a more rewarding play than we remembered it to be.

The Wolfit Company uses a production designed by Ernest Stern. Card-like set pieces, which can be folded into anything from Usurper's Court to Arden Forest, are manipulated by pages against a black cyclorama.

The Wolfit Company, as you probably have read, comes from England via Canada. Materials for scenery and costumes are still rationed in England and the valiant Wolfit troups must of necessity use make-shift decor.

In "As You Like," Wolfit steps into the shadows of the clown, Touchstone, and moves his leading lady, Rosalind Iden, into the spotlight that is the lovely Rosalind, the character for whom she was named by her director-father and actress-mother.

Miss Iden has charm, is much too pretty to be impersonating a boy for most of the performance, reads gracefully and has the fetching figure required when Rosalind dons masculine disguise.

Wolfit, looking like a red-headed version of the Charles Coburn who used to tour the country in Shakespeare and Moliere, is a witty, rich-voiced Touchstone. He wisely shuns some of the hokey horseplay with which too many actors have invested the role.

Penelope Chandler is all right as Celia till she talks. Her clipped, very British speech is extremely difficult to understand. George Bradford and Robert Algar are to be commended for their opulent tone and clarity of diction as Lord and Amiens.

'AS YOU LIKE IT.'

Comedy by William Shakespeare; settings and costumes by Ernest Stern; music arranged by Rosabel Watson; staged by Donald Wolfit and Christopher Ede; presented by Hall Shelton, by arrangement with Advance Players Association, Ltd., at the Century Theater Thursday afternoon, February 20, 1947.

The cast:

Duke	Alexander Gauge
Frederick	David Dodimead
Jacques	John Wynyard
Lord	George Bradford
Amiens	Robert Algar
Le Beau	Geoffrey Wilkinson
Charles	Josef Shear
Oliver	Frederick Horrey
Jacques	David Dodimead
Orlando	Kempster Barnes
Adam	Eric Adeney
Dennis	Charles Ollington
Touchstone	Donald Wolfit
Sir Oliver Martext	David Dodimead
Corin	Malcom Watson
Silvius	Richard Blythe
William	Josef Shear
Hymen	Robert Algar
Rosalind	Rosalind Iden
Celia	Penelope Chandler
Phoebe	Ann Chalkley
Audrey	Marion Marshal

SYNOPSIS: Scene: Oliver's Orchard, the Usurper's Court, the Forest of Arden.

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 21, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Having put its worst foot forward with "King Lear" on Tuesday, Mr. Wolfit's London Company brought forward a better-shod foot yesterday afternoon. They added to their repertory a pleasantly informal production of Shakespeare's "As You Like It," at the Century Theatre. Although some of the actors continue to swallow their words like terrified clerks, Rosalind Iden, who inevitably plays Shakespeare's Rosalind, speaks very well indeed—better than Mr. Wolfit, whose Touchstone is a little too sophisticated for such humdrum virtues as intelligibility.

Perhaps this production of Shakespeare's amiable pastorial should be regarded as Miss Iden's personal afternoon. Wearing becoming costumes, she gives an animated and humorous performance that avoids the archness which can be so intolerable in a light-veined frolic. Kempster Barnes' Orlando is a slow-witted youth afflicted with slovenly speech. Rosalind is brisk and gay enough to deserve a more dashing swain. It is to be feared that in general Mr. Wolfit's company has less trouble in casting Audreys and Williams than figures in high romance.

In a snarling world, let something be said in praise of Shakespeare's masque in the Forest of Arden. It is kind-hearted. Apart from the purely functional villainies that engender the plot, the characters in "As You Like It" address each other courteously and have generous impulses. And this civil attitude, notably in the hospitality the Duke in the forest shows to the starving Orlando and Adam, is worth preserving, if only as an anachronism from a beautifully imagined world drawn by a poet who loved to use the word "love" for friendship as well as passion.

The Jacques in Mr. Wolfit's company is John Wynyard, who substitutes for the traditional melancholy a thinner and more sardonic spirit. Although his style is not fully resolved, he has caught hold of a good idea that is worth strengthening and developing. Eric Adeney acts especially well the part of the loyal and feeble old Adam; Josef Shear and Marion Marshall are amusing as William and Audrey, respectively. As the benevolent Duke living in exile, Alexander Gauge has the tempo and attitude that make the part attractive.

* * *

For scenery, Ernest Stern has designed a series of gaily-painted panels that can be changed in the true fashion of a masque. And the costumes, also designed by Mr. Stern, are an improvement over the dreary rags wrapped around "King Lear." There is more delight and beauty in "As You Like It" than Mr. Wolfit's company have wrung out of the text. But they have stirred up enough of Shakespeare's sweetness and humor to provide an afternoon's pleasant entertainment.

The Sun

FEBRUARY 21, 1947

'As You Like It,' Wolfit's Second Offering, Provides Dull Matinee Exercises.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Donald Wolfit and his harassed but earnest players, engaged with a Shakespearean festival at the southern margin of Central Park, turned to "As You Like It" yesterday afternoon, and again with indifferent results. And the truth is, of course, the pastoral comedy is a far lesser play than "King Lear" could be under any circumstances.

This visiting company, unfortunately, has no tricks of lighting or scenic magic with which to bolster a play. Their production equipment is negligible and in the case of "As You Like It" the effects are very skimpy indeed. They just give you the comedy to the full extent of their talents and for what it really is—a preposterous charade of a banished duke, a wandering clown, a girl masquerading in boy's clothes and assorted goings-on the lovelorn in the Forest of Arden.

Some of the Elizabethan enthusiasts of last Tuesday evening were significantly absent at yesterday's matinee as Wolfit, shorn of Lear's snowy beard, took over the role of the clown and Rosalind Iden, a competent actress, appeared as Rosalind. Wolfit doesn't succeed in making Touchstone a very jocose fellow, but Miss Iden has the spirit and the figure for the part of the roguish Rosalind, played in our time by everybody from Julia Marlowe to Marjorie Rambeau, and she brings a lot of life to her scenes.

Alexander Gauge, with the best Shakespearean voice in the troupe, plays the Duke in exile. Kempster Barnes is moderately good as the lovesick Orlando. The Seven Ages of Man speech, as delivered by John Wynyard, playing the cynical Jacques, falls rather flat.

The shortcomings of the Wolfit company are quite as apparent in the comedy as they were in "King Lear," but let it be also recorded that "As You Like It" is just not the sprightly romp that Shakespeare must have intended it to be when he dashed it off. It might have seemed so in Julia Marlowe's day but, having seen the play four times, I'm still to be convinced.

PM

FEBRUARY 21, 1947

—*Kronenberger*

Better Done Though Less Worth Doing

PM Reviews

Our English visitors' second production is a nice improvement over their first. Unfortunately, nothing like so much can be said of their second play. Where *King Lear* is the most towering thing Shakespeare ever wrote, surely *As You Like It* is one of the most tedious. I have seen it, and tried to enjoy it, many times in the theater—from some dim period of my mismanaged youth to that Fourth of July night, a year or two ago, when college students from the State of Washington attempted it on Broadway. That there is mellow wisdom in it, and much pretty poetry, and a vague pastoral charm, no one will deny—though even from that angle it lacks the true enchantment of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Tempest*. And none of the things it has can save the plot from being exceedingly undramatic, or from becoming exceedingly dull. The comedy, again, can scarcely be termed crisp, and the coyness at its worst makes Barrie seem surly. Perhaps some day a very great troupe will play *As You Like It* with such style, and such feeling for pastoral, as to make up in mood for what is lacking in momentum; but that is a good deal to hope for.

* * *

Meanwhile the Donald Wolfit troupe are playing it very agreeably. Using movable painted screens for scenery, they make no effort to beguile the eye; but they do nicely by the ear. The incidental music is pleasant, the songs in the play are pleasantly sung, and most members of the company speak their lines as well as, in *King Lear*, they spoke them badly. (The versification of *As You Like It*, being much earlier, is much easier—besides not requiring a *dramatic* inflexion; and of course there is a good deal of prose.)

Beyond that, the key role of the play is in good hands. Miss Iden's Rosalind is far better than her Cordelia, and, I suspect, far better suited to her. She is pretty to look at, and she plays with spirit and gaiety, and with no more archness than the part compels upon her. Mr. Wolfit plays Touchstone without seeming specially gifted for that style of comedy. Kempster Barnes makes a pleasant Orlando, and Alexander Gauge a proper Duke; the Jaques of John Wynyard seems more malnourished than melancholy, but he gets through "All the world's a stage" less self-consciously than most. The Phoebe, the Audrey, the Silvius, the William and the cast are best described as victims: the present production can be recommended as cheerful enough, if you happen to care for the play.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

"King Lear"

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New York Post

FEBRUARY 19, 1947

English Actor Donald Wolfit In Shakespeare's 'King Lear'

By Richard Watts Jr.

Being a perhaps incorrigible optimist, I keep hoping to come across a completely satisfying production of "King Lear" some time. The one which Donald Wolfit, the British actor-manager, brought to the Century Theatre last night is by no means it, because, with the exception of Mr. Wolfit and a few members of his supporting cast, the players left a good deal to be desired. Nevertheless, the visiting star is the best Lear I have yet seen, and the production, while undistinguished, has the high virtue of suggesting something of the magnitude of one of the great dramatic masterpieces of world literature.

There has always been a vast difference of opinion as to whether this enormously difficult tragedy can possibly be done adequately in the theatre, with such eminent Shakespearean authorities as Charles Lamb and Margaret Webster firm in the conviction that it cannot. One of the paradoxes of the Wolfit production is that, while it is not good enough to disprove such a negative verdict, it possesses enough virtues to makes one fear that the doubters may be right.

Take, for example, Mr. Wolfit's splendid portrayal of the title role. He is always in character, always intelligent and well-spoken, achieving the quality of senility changing into madness with moving pathos.

Or take the tremendous episode of madness in the storm, with the professional fool, the pretended lunatic and the really insane Lear crying out in their bitterness as the elements rage about them. In the reading it provides an unforgettable experience, but in the playing it stubbornly refuses to come to dramatic life in anywhere near the same overwhelming fashion.

At this point, however, the weakness of the production gets seriously in the way. Although Mr. Wolfit is both admirable and, what is even more important, audible in this vital episode, the actors playing the fool and the pretended lunatic, Edgar, are unimpressive and unintelligible.

It all goes to show, of course, what those who insist that "King Lear" can be properly done on the stage admit—that the successful performance must have brilliant portrayals, not only in the title role, but in all the lesser parts. Here, it must be reported, Mr. Wolfit has not been fortunate.

As the faithful Kent, one of the most attractive chaarcters in Shakespeare, Alexander Gauge is excellent, showing the fidelity, the boldness and the independence of the valiant Earl with fine skill. In addition, Rosalind Iden is a good and believable Cordelia, particularly in the final scene. But some of the others are most ineffective. Goneril and Regan, the wolfish sisters, are not well cast, and there is much more to the role of the malignant Edmund than the current playing ever indicates. The sets are not helpful, either.

In the end, although the issue of the possibility of doing this mastodonic masterpiece on the stage continues in doubt, it remains evident that, while "King Lear" is about as far from being a tidy play as could well be imagined, there can be no question about the titanic magnificence of its stature as dramatic literature

'KING LEAR.'

Play by William Shakespeare; staged by Donald Wolfit and Christopher Ede; costumes and settings by Ernest Stern; music arranged by Ronald Watson; presented by Hall Shelton, by arrangement with Advance Players Association, Ltd., at the Century Theater Tuesday evening, February 18, 1947. The cast:

Lear, King of Britain.....Donald Wolfit
King of France.....David Dodimead
Duke of Burgundy.....George Bradford
Duke of Cornwall.....Joost Shear
Duke of Albany.....Robert Algar
Earl of Kent.....Alexander Gauge
Earl of Gloucester.....Eric Maxon
Edgar, son to Gloucester.....Kempster Barnes
Edmund, bastard son to Gloucester.....Frederick Horrey
Curan, a courtier.....Malcolm Watson
Oswald, steward to Goneril.....John Wynyard
Tenant to Gloucester.....George Bradford
Doctor.....Malcolm Watson
Fool.....Geoffrey Wilkinson
Officer.....David Dodimead
Herald.....Richard Blythe
Servant to Cornwall.....Richard Blythe
Goneril, Regan, Daughters to King Lear.....Violet Farebrother, Ann Chalkley
Cordelia.....Rosalind Iden

Knights of Lear's train, officers, messengers, soldiers and attendants.

SYNOPSIS: The scene is in Britain and the play is presented in two acts.

DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 19, 1947

Donald Wolfit Repertory Opens With an Uninspired 'King Lear'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Donald Wolfit, an English actor-manager whose business is trouping Shakespeare, opened an engagement at the Century Theatre last evening by presenting himself as King Lear. He did not, as did a regal mummer of a bygone day, play the king as though he were afraid someone else was going to play the ace; he gave Lear the works with a complete lack of trepidation.

Judging from the first performance of Wolfit & Co., this visiting repertory troupe is little concerned with finesse; subtleties of stage direction, lighting, makeup and even acting are not allowed to interfere with the main business at hand—which is to put Shakespeare on a stage and make him stay put.

Since Shakespeare is always all right without any outside help, this is a perfectly laudable intent. Unhappily, some of last night's performers were working under a handicap. They were playing in a foreign land, and to some of us natives they were speaking an alien tongue. Had I not known that the linotype did not exist in Master Will's time, I'd have sworn that many of his best passages said, simply enough, etaoinshrdlu.

A Thorough Performance.

But this is my fault, for being a native, and not the visitors'. As they continue their repertoire with "As You Like It" on Thursday, "The Merchant of Venice" on Saturday and "Hamlet" and Ben Jonson's "Volpone" next week, I hope to attune my ear.

Mr. Wolfit's King Lear is a thoroughgoing job—a conscientious actor's job of portraying a monarch gone mad. There is nothing regal, nothing heroic in this madness, but only the pitiable idiocy of a very old man. Mr. Wolfit's voice has power and flexibility; his physical carriage is convincing, and his makeup—like that of almost everybody else in the troupe—approaches the godawful.

Among the supporting performances I like best the playing of Alexander Gauge as the Earl of Kent—a quiet, authoritative piece of work. Violet Farebrother and Ann Chalkley are veritable terrors as the king's two wicked daughters, and Rosalind Iden is quite handsome and sweet as the good one. I find Kempster Barnes' Edgar rather trying, particularly when he feigns lunacy, and I can't get the hang of what Geoffrey Wilkinson is saying as the Fool.

The play is presented in two acts, and it keeps moving nicely in Ernest Stern's useful traveling sets.